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AN INTERVIEW WITH *LEONARD STARR*

Artist and writer of ***MARY PERKINS ON STAGE*** and ***ANNIE***. pg.19

EPIC ILLUSTRATED RE-EXAMINED

One year old, and still experimenting. ***Archie Goodwin*** tells why. pg.61

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1980: THE YEAR IN REVIEW

All the year's significant series reviewed ***by our all-star critics.***

pg.34

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END NOTES

Walt Kelly's ***POGO***, the major casualty of the Presidential campaign. Review ***by Peter Sanderson.*** pg.96

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FRANKLY SPEAKING

A fond look at the work of ***INVADERS*** artist Frank Robbins ***by Roger Stern.*** pg. 86

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THE FANDOM ZONE

"Fandom Origins" reveals the Code to fandom for the first time. ***By Don and Maggie Thompson.*** pg.75

THE GREAT CONTINUITY FORUM

Essays on the uses and desirability of "Universe Continuity"—or lack of it. ***By Rich Morrissey, Chuck Huber, and Donna Ugol.*** pg.66

GUILTY FANTASIES

Pete's Podium. 'Nuff said, right, tigers? ***By Peter Gillis.*** pg.89

HEADLINES

Englehart's and Rogers' ***MADAME XANADU*** to be specialty-shop-exclusive project—and more news. pg.11

THE LOST COMICS COMPANIES

JUMBO COMICS, home of Sheena. ***By Chuck Wooley.*** pg.92

MORNING NOTICES

Comments on past issues, and issues raised in past issues. pg.9

OPENING NOTES

Why one of ***COMICS FEATURE***'s editors keeps reading comics. ***By Richard Howell.*** pg. 6

THE SUPER-TEAM SPIRIT PART II

Marvel Comics' Timely super-group of the 1940s/1970s, The Invaders, and their spinoffs. ***by Murray Ward.*** pg. 82

Front cover by Richard Howell.
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OPENING NOTES

by Richard Howell

The question "Are Comics Art?" has spawned as many interpretations of itself as it has answers. Like many seemingly simple questions, lying placidly over vast controversy, "Are Comics Art?" requires sharp delineations of the term "Art" before any responsible rejoinder could conceivably be framed.

COMICS FEATURE, perhaps more than any other comics-related magazine, chooses to focus instead on the different aspects of comics which merit whatever attention they receive (be it "serious" attention or not). Certainly some comics can—and do—have interesting internal histories, places in our history, art techniques, etc., without having any claim to being "***A-rt.***" The reason that I became interested in the comics I first read had little to do with whether my Sociology or Visual Studies professors would approve. Comics were—to descend into cliche—***good clean fun.*** (Hell, they were being written for 1950s children what sort of choices did they have?)

Certainly the comics field has changed since the early 1960s. The rest of the world has become faster-paced, more sophisticated, perhaps grimmer, and comics have followed suit. As opposed to the comics of 1960-5, nearly all of today's comics feature "action" in large amounts, most have continued stories (or at least never-ending continued subplots), the tone has shifted closer in alignment to the post-Viet Nam consciousness; in which heroism is rarely simple and never pure, disenchantment with authority is the rule rather than the exception, and cyniesim equals awareness. The Marvel comics of the early 1970s frequently confronted social problems and political figures who were ***doppelgangers*** for those in our own young lives. Is it any wonder that those comics seemed more sophisticated, more adult, than the more traditional fare? The fact that those social problems were seemingly more often presented as therapy for the writer than as education for the reader (and by writers whose attitudes bordered on personal paranoia) made little difference to the audience.

And truthfully, those comics were indeed exciting! The readership that had grown up with comics was tired of the old ***shticks*** and was bucking for new thrills, new kicks. Forget all talk about education and socialization—the main purpose of comics is ***excitement.*** If that means that the educational DCs and the raw and melodramatic Marvels of the 1960s were outdated, so be it. In the 1970s, the comics companies had to titillate the audience who could not be excited by the 1960s-style comics, regardless of how well they were done. They needed something ***new***, something ***more***—and the companies gave it to them. It became an ever-accelerating process: ***more*** excitement! If that meant adding certain elements (political themes, sexual allusions, ever-longer storylines), it was done. If it meant disposing of or abridging certain other elements (traditional heroics, story structure, educational functions), then that too was done.

The Cat Burglar on his way to the Big Time

Frankly, by and large, I find modern comics rather depressing. The double-edged concept of creating "Art" comics has produced a generation of comics professionals characterized by their worship of technique over content, of flash over substance. In their quest for higher sophistication, moral ambiguity, etc., I find that today's comics creators have let languish any attempts at extending the qualities that attracted ***me*** to comics in the first place: clarity of plot, inspirational and empathic characterization, and the presentation of a system of moralist, humanist-oriented behavior with an emphasis on personal integrity. I mean, what's the fun of reading comics with characters that make me ashamed for them, ashamed of myself for being a member of the same species as they are, and which deal with themes—however objectively sophisticated—in a degrading and depressing way?

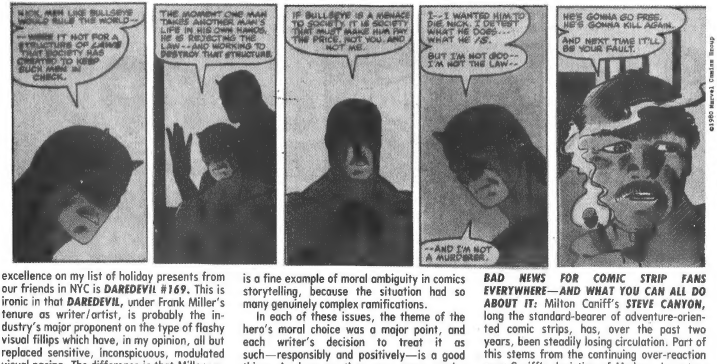
I don't know. As far as I can tell; none—no fun at all.

Fortunately, they're not ***all*** like that! In the past month two different approaches to comics writing have produced two comics each so encouraging, so entertaining, ***so excellent***, that I can't let the preceeding morose doomsaying go unbalanced by the omission of mentioning the type of comics which keep me reading comics.

The first is ***MARVEL SPOTLIGHT #11*** featuring ***"Captain Universe"*** by Bill Mantlo and Steve Ditko. This creative team consistently produces as close to 1960s-style Marvel Comics as are presently available, and ***MS#11 ("The Big Time" a.k.a. "Claws of the Cat")*** is ample proof that those comics are not overly unsophisticated for today's audience. The criminal cat burglar is fatally shot, changed to a ***living*** Captain Universe, and maintains his life as long as he fights against evil. The ambiguous ending implies a good deal about the "unipower's" mission for good in the universe and how it would only sustain those who ***choose*** to further that good. Mantlo's story is clearly, cleanly told, with the minimal amount of copy which so often used to allow sensitive and imaginative readers the option of identifying with and fleshing out the characters on their own (a practice since superceded by the present proclivity for filling all available panel space with ill-considered psychobabble).

Ditko's pacing and panel composition are, as usual, flawless, and his use of spot blacks to add to the compositional clarity is as fine as ever. He even devises an effective "cat-shadow" visual signature for the cat burglar-Captain Universe's presence. Only a certain sketchiness and disregard for detail separates his work in ***MS*** from his classic cops-'n'-robbers ***SPIDER-MAN***s of the 1960s.

Interestingly enough, the second item of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--AND I'M NOT A MURDERER.
HE'S GONNA GO FREE, HE'S GONNA KILL AGAIN, AND NEXT TIME IT'LL BE YOUR FAULT.
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excellence on my list of holiday presents from our friends in NYC is ***DAREDEVIL #169.*** This is ironic in that ***DAREDEVIL,*** under Frank Miller's tenure as writer/artist, is probably the industry's major proponent on the type of flashy visual fillips which have, in my opinion, all but replaced sensitive, inconspicuous, modulated visual pacing. The difference is that Miller understands the ***purpose*** of those visual tricks, and uses them with propriety—and ultimately, with restraint. I would argue that the reason Miller's ***DAREDEVILs*** are so overflowing with neo-Eisnerian cinematics and panelogical underscorings is that Miller understands the uses of so ***many*** of them. ***DD #169*** has more than one per page, and all are used expertly: the "held camera" as the movie fan moves in to kayo Bullseye and then backs off, or as Bullseye moves through the street assaulting the "devils"; the progressive closeness of focus on DD (accompanied by inset panels) as he strains to hear progressively softer sounds; and the undercutting of one scene with an identical visual image (as with the subway lights segue-ing into a frame of the rising sun).

More important, though, is Miller's message, and his treatment of it. Daredevil tries to stop the murdering Bullseye's attacks as much for Bullseye's sake as for that of the victims—and potential victims. Bullseye, explains Dr. Silken Gloss, has a brain tumor which will kill him unless he is brought back to the hospital for an operation. Although Daredevil knows as much as anyone does that society would be better off without Bullseye, he is still determined to save ***any*** life possible. This attitude is saved from being mere theorizing by Daredevil's grueling battle with Bullseye before our hero can save the madman. The story's message is further saved from being the quasi-moralistic fiction of a Pollyanna writer by Miller's explicit last-page treatment of Daredevil's recognition of the strengths ***and weaknesses*** of his moral position. When the reader applauds Daredevil at the end of #169, it is because the adventurer has made a difficult moral decision and accepts its responsibility. The Bullseye story is a fine example of moral ambiguity in comics storytelling, because the situation had so many genuinely complex ramifications.

In each of these issues, the theme of the hero's moral choice was a major point, and each writer's decision to treat it as such—responsibly and positively—is a good thing. As long as there are some comics creators in the business who believe that comics characters ***should*** exhibit responsible compassion and embody human virtues, comics will never become too "sophisticated" for me.

RESPONSIBILITY IN COMICS REVIEWING UPDATE:

As long-time readers will remember, back in ***COMICS FEATURE*** #7's editorial about how I felt it was important for me to read all the comics produced if I presumed to critique them from any sort of informed position, I mentioned that none of the comics companies sent ***FEATURE*** any free copies, and that that circumstance made my weekly scan of the racks all that much more my own responsibility. Well, things have changed somewhat on that score, and it would be unfair to let you readers retain that previous image of Marvel, DC etc.

The change is that since that editorial, newly-appointed DC promotional liason ***Andrew Helfer*** has begun sending out promotional copies of each of the publications in the DC lineup—free—to the different commentary magazines. We're all quite pleased at this change in our status ***vis-a-vis*** DC.

BAD NEWS FOR COMIC STRIP FANS EVERYWHERE—AND WHAT YOU CAN ALL DO ABOUT IT: Milton Caniff's ***STEVE CANYON,*** long the standard-bearer of adventure-oriented comic strips, has, over the past two years, been steadily losing circulation. Part of this stems from the continuing over-reaction over Caniff's depiction of Madame Lynx torturing lady lawyer Convoy (two years ago), yet still more of ***CANYON***'s circulation woes derive from the whims of comic strip editors for individual papers. These editors can be swayed by reader mail, and when they drop adventure strips and get little or no response (as opposed to the perversely massive unfavorable mail garnered when one of them attempts to drop ***NANCY***), then another nail gets driven into the coffin of the modern newspaper adventure strip. ***CANYON*** is important not only because it has always been a fine example of comic art, and that Milton Caniff is probably the most influential cartoonist in the modern history of the medium, but also because ***if*** the long-established master of comic strip adventure is cancelled out of the comic sections, and no readers object and defend him, then what hope have those strips without Caniff's long history, technique, or overall excellence? What hope will there be for the adventure strip as a genre? Not much, it would seem.

So this is a chance for all of you readers to safeguard one of the endangered species of comics, and in doing so, help continue the adventures of one of the genre's most famous characters—currently beset by nothing so much as reader apathy: ***STEVE CANYON.***

If your hometown paper carries ***STEVE CANYON,*** then write them and tell them how much you enjoy it. If they don't—write and ask them why not. Hey, and if you've never ***read*** the strip, you owe it to yourself to locate one of the reprint volumes currently in circulation. There's good reasons why Milton Caniff shows up on nearly every comics professional's list of heroes. Find out why, and you'll probably contact your paper without ***any*** prompting.

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MORNING NOTICES

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Bhob Stewart
SOMERVILLE, MA

Dear Richard Howell et all:

COMICS FEATURE deserves applause for giving so much attention to Art Spiegelman, Francoise Mouly, Bill Griffith—three important figures in the advancement of contemporary art who deserve more attention than they've been getting from most "media" mags.

One of the problems of the Interview Form, though, is that casual statements become history. Since no fully researched article has ever been written on ***"Wacky Packages,"*** the errors put forth by Bill Griffith are now history. Until corrected. Which I will now do:

1) Griffith says "...Art Spiegelman, who was (and still is in some ways) the resident genuis at Topps Bubble Gum." Actually, there were ***several*** important figures at Topps: A) Larry Riley, who died a few years ago, brainstormed the bizarre ***"Flying Things"*** (praised by Larry Rivers) and many other Topps ideas. Riley, who was a fleischer and Paramount animator, devised the 3D comic process used by Harvey Comics in the 1950s. When I was employed in the Topps Product Department, I was there for several weeks before I realized that Larry, in a back room, was the source of much of the best work at Topps. He was also a great raconteur with many funny stories about nutty animators he had known. b) Stan Hart, who also wrote for ***MAD***, off-Broadway and won an Emmy for ***THE CAROL BURNETT SHOW***. c) Woody Gelman, head of the department (as editor, art director) who also had been with Fleischer in the Thirties, had also done comics (***NUTSY SQUIRREL, DODO AND THE FROG***) in the Forties and later founded Nostalgia Press during his lunch hours. d) Len Brown, associate editor, who also wrote ***THUNDER AGENTS*** and other comics. Etc.

2) Griffith says, "Since he was sixteen he hung around there, because that's where Wally Wood worked at the time." A very misleading statement. Wood did ***much*** work at Topps (some of it from my layouts when I was working out of his studio) and hated it. When he came out to Topps in 1968, he told me it was only the second time he'd ever been there (and, at that point, he had been freelancing for Topps by mail for years). Also, I believe when Art was 16 he had already been doing professional cartoon work for a Long Island newspaper.

3) Griffith says, "...you're looking at the other half of the team that's responsible for ***"Wacky Packages."*** But, Bill, what about all the others? ***COMICS FEATURE*** prints the ***"Blunder Bread" Wacky Pack*** in this interview. My memory is that this was originally a gag roughed out by Kim Deitch and then fashioned into a tight comp by myself before it was sent off to be painted. This was one of the ***"Wacky Ads"*** later reworked into a ***"Wacky Package."*** Jay Lynch also worked on ***"Wacky Ads."*** (I believe ***"Vile Soap"*** is by Lynch.) My memory is better on the ones done by myself: the ***"Mustard Charge"*** (my own favorite because the size approximates the size of a legit card), ***"Land O' Quakes Butter"*** (possibly I got the original gag for this from Paula Clark), ***"Nestrae," "Brute 88."*** The ***"Armor Hot Dogs"*** was roughed out by me from an earlier rough given to me by Peter Jukovsky (son of Marty Jukovsky who was very much involved in New York science fiction fandom of the 1950s). ***"Rabid Shave"*** and several others featured in the ***NEW YORK*** magazine cover story were by me.

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4) Griffith says, "Harvey Kurtzman originated it..." Actually, I believe the inspiration for ***"Wacky Packages"*** were the sticker inserts in the ***MAD*** annuals—which began after Kurtzman had split from ***MAD***.

5) Griffith says, "We didn't do the final paintings; those were done by these great old hacks, these great old pulp cover hacks they had who'd turn out these beautiful paintings." Specifically, these people were a) Ray Hammond (who, I believe, was on staff), and b) Norman Saunders, who has done paperback book covers (Ace's ***THE IMPOTENT GENERAL***), pulps (the May, 1939, ***MARVEL SCIENCE STORIES*** and many, many more) and comic book cover paintings for Fawcett, Gilberton and Ziff-Davis. Saunders had a NYC show of his paintings in 1979. The LA artist Tom Maher (who may not have done any ***"Wacky Packages"*** final renderings) was so highly prized by Topps that they flew him in to Brooklyn to whip out finished paintings. Maher also did the cover on the last issue of ***CASTLE OF FRANKENSTEIN***. He died, so I was told, from a gun fired by his brother.

6) Griffith says, "...they'd get a letter from a lawyer whenever they did something outrageous and they'd instantly stop printing the offending sticker." I believe (someone may correct ***me*** on this one) that, since the cards are all printed on a single sheet and then sliced up and collated, removing just ***one*** of the series to satisfy the demands of the injured party was actually a difficult proposition. And recalling all the gum boxes was also improbable. So when someone complained (Nabisco hated ***"Rats Crackers"*** because rats really ***do*** go for Ritz Crackers), it simply sold off until replaced by the ***next entire series***.

7) "Never went to court over anything; just gave in to anybody who yelled at them." The reason for this was the likelihood that a court decision could have resulted in the possible removal of ***all "Wacky Packages"*** from the stores, something Topps certainly wanted to avoid.

Ann Nichols
TUSCON, AZ

I read ***COMICS FEATURE #6*** and ***#7*** today and there are a couple of things I'd like to say besides the fact that I enjoyed them.

1. I ***hate*** splitting pages up with several articles. It's distracting.

2. Ever since I left childhood (more or less) I've preferred the married characters. Their

relationships can be deeper than the usual situations, and thus, more interesting.

We have at least temporarily discontinued our "sidebar" system of laying out related articles (which we assume is what you refer to in your first point). This is partially due to complaints similar to yours. Unless there's a great hue and cry to the contrary, we'll probably remain with our present, more traditional style of page layout.

Also the "Marriage and Super-Heroes" articles in #6 received more mail than any subject in COMICS FEATURE's Admittedly-short history, obviously manifesting itself as a topic about which many comics readers are interested. For more about the subject, see Margaret O'Connell's "Academy of Midnight" column, beginning in our sister magazine LOC #2.

Roy Thomas
SYCAMORE, CA

Dear CF,

Congratulations on another fine issue, especially the interview with Steve Englehart. As a new (if somewhat reluctant) writer of ***BATMAN***, I'm interested in the comments of one of the people who has made the most significant writing contribution to the character in recent years—and I remember how chagrined I was recently to read for the first time the fine issues he and Marshall Rogers and Walt Simonson did of ***DETECTIVE***, since I knew that sales of those issues were so poor they virtually caused the cancellation of the title. But that's a problem we all wrestle with all the time—doing the best we can, and then finding material which we deem inferior selling much better. All we can do is keep trying to combine quality and deadline-meeting the best we can.

On the matter of my being "unfair" to poor ol' Steve, though—well, I suppose I **was**, now and then. I never worked any time with or for an editor **I** didn't feel did some unfair things, and Steve sometimes has trouble viewing things from someone else's perspective. I took ***THE HULK*** back because his issues weren't selling, period; I never had any interest in doing the magazine, despite the amazingly good sales record Trimpe and I had together on the book, better than Stan and Trimpe before or Archie Goodwin and Trimpe later. As for ***THE AVENGERS***: Well, I had written some 70 issues of ***THE AVENGERS***, immediately prior to Steve's then-brief reign on the book, and had always wanted to do a double-size issue... never getting to, except for an annual or two. I was more than willing, despite my own personal feelings, to let Steve do all the giant issues after the first one, but felt I had earned, long since, the right to do the first ***GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS***. I still feel that way, more than half a decade later.

As for other matters, I'll just say in defense of other editors that, though Englehart is undoubtedly one of the best writers to come down the pike as far as comics are concerned, he could try the patience of a saint... and I'm no saint. I remember having to spend part of a Sunday night plotting a ***CAPTAIN AMERICA*** story because Sal Buscema called me, mad as hell at having no work for the next morning because of Steve; I also recall Steve's outrage when learned that I wouldn't let him write that particular issue (with Phoenix, son of Zemo), giving it to Tony Isabella instead. Anyone who has to ask **why** I did that is never going to understand the answer, and there were other occasions rather similar. Still, Steve was generally a joy to work with, and I mention the above only as one not-totally-isolated example of the fact that he, as much as me or any other editor, can be an egocentric pain in the ass. But I'll sure buy his novel when it comes out, and I'm sorry we've never seen more of each other.

As for his comments on the comics companies—well, I'm happy right now starting work for DC, and don't know much about that side of it, but I agree almost totally with him that the companies have become structured in the past half-decade in such a way that makes real writer/artist creativity such as Stan (and later myself) allowed and promulgated almost an impossibility. I'm not surprised that a Marvel editor today would be almost totally ignorant of the way the best years of the company happened... which is why, despite some high points, it isn't likely to happen again. I personally feel that DC's 10% plan, giving the creators a share of merchandising, is a fair enough start... but it's true that no place seems to exist any more for real flights of fancy, or just having fun with characters without going through ten layers of bureaucracy. And in the long run, the companies have more to lose that way than the individual writers and artists do.

Always glad to hear the "other side" of any of our articles or interviews, Roy—especially when presented in such a reasonable tone as your letter was in. If Steve has anything to add to any of his points, or to comment on about yours, we'll be happy to listen to him, too. You two might not see each other any more than you would otherwise, but CF will always encourage communication.

Character ©1981 Marvel Comics Group

DC TRIES FAN MARKET

ENGLEHART AND ROGERS' MADAME XANADU IN SPECIAL COLLECTORS' ALBUM

DC announced that it will be releasing a special one-shot ***MADAME XANADU*** comic. The book will contain the long inventoried Steve Englehart and Marshall Rogers story that was originally slated to appear in ***DOORWAY INTO NIGHTMARE***. That comic was cancelled due to sluggish sales before the material could see print and DC has long been considering how to best package the story.

According to DC Business Manager Paul Levitz the company investigated a number of different marketing approaches before it settled on a special one-shot comic that would be released only to the comic books specialty shops. According to Levitz, DC had considered ordinary newsstand distribution for the package, even going so far as to use a computerized research system to isolate those stands that had done particularly well with ***DOORWAY INTO NIGHTMARE***; however, the final decision was in favor of experimenting with comics shops to see just how strong a market exists among the fans. During the summer, however, the specialty shops plan was replaced by Editor Jack C. Harris's idea to transform the inventoried material into a three part mini-series. Englehart and Rogers were commissioned to execute two more stories related in some way to the first one which could be marketed as a three issue limited series. The mini-series died still-born when Englehart pulled out of the project due to a bitter disagreement with DC over pay rates. Left with the single inventory story, DC returned to the original plan of a special direct retail book.

Levitz believes that the direct retail market is ideal for the comic: "The book has no special appeal to newsstand readers, but the specialty shops have a real interest in the material." He also went on to say that DC is now confident that the collector's market is large enough to support such a project and that "we think it will be a special treat for the shops to get a book that nobody else has." He added that DC currently has no plans to promote the book as heavily as was done for ***DETECTIVE #500***, because "this project has stronger momentum in the fan market—we don't have to tell people, 'look at this, this is going to be good.' The readers know that already."

Andy Helfer, DC's new press liason, described the Madame Xanadu story as revolving around a young drug addict. Since the material contains several sexual allusions and very graphic visuals of the New York City drug scene, the book will not be submitted to the Comics Code Authority and will not carry their seal of approval when it goes on sale in April.

The complete package will contain the twenty-five page Madame Xanadu story, a centerfold of the mysterious seer by Michael Kaluta, and an unrelated science fiction story by J. Marc DeMatteis and Brian

continued on next page

The cover of the upcoming *MADAME XANADU* volume

continued from previous page

Bolland. The cover will be by Michael Kaluta. The book will retail for $1.00 and will go on sale sometime in mid-April.

The Englehart story, entitled "Dance For Two Demons," is a psychological study of a demonically-influenced love affair between a misshapen drug addict and an aspiring witch. Andy Helfer claims that the pages he's seen showcase Englehart's humanistic approach to dialogue, and, given the ornate settings Madame Xanadu is wont to surround herself with, Rogers' deft handling of highly-detailed, intricately laid-out artstyle. He claims that the story "rivals any of their previous works."

PLEASE... SIT DOWN. YOU HAVE QUESTIONS.
YES, AND I HOPE YOU CAN HELP.
I CAME TO SEE YOU BECAUSE MY AUNT ESTHER SAID SHE KNEW A MADAM XANADU...
ABOUT FORTY YEARS AGO, BUT IT COULDN'T HAVE BEEN YOU.
MY NAME IS LAURA GRANT AND I'M JUST IN FROM SOUTH DAKOTA--MITCHELL, SOUTH DAKOTA.
WAS IT YOUR MOTHER, MAYBE? AH, AUNT?
©1980 DC Comics

Mme. Xanadu is introduced to her newest supplicant—and to the reader, courtesy of Steve Englehart and Marshall Rogers

An addict forces his way into Xanadu's stately palace, little dreaming what is housed inside

Off on another mission, Madame Xanadu exits

"Dance For Two Demons" is the first time that either creator has worked with the Madame Xanadu character. When the story was first commissioned, back in the days when ***DOORWAY TO NIGHTMARE*** was still being published, DC was searching for the proper "look" to the comic and assigned stories to a variety of experimental or fan popular creative teams. Englehart and Rogers had already established their fan popularity with their work on ***DETECTIVE COMICS*** and, since Englehart has a well-known interest in the occult arts, they were a natural choice for a story assignment.

MARVEL GAINS RIGHTS TO JAMES BOND, LOST ARK

O'NEIL/MILLER AND GOODWIN/BUSCEMA CHOSEN TO WRITE AND DRAW

Although Marvel had earlier announced that their negotiations with the owners of the James Bond character had fallen through, it seems that Marvel and the Ian Fleming estate have come to an agreement and there will indeed be a James Bond comic book. Plans now call for the first appearance of the monthly Bond comic to be an adaptation of this summer's Bond movie, ***FOR YOUR EYES ONLY***. Denny O'Neil will be scripting the book, while Frank Miller has been shifted from other projects in order to be scheduled as the series's initial penciller. The movie adaptation will be released both as a full-color Marvel Super Special magazine and as a three-part serial in the regular comic. After the movie adaptation runs its course, there are plans to use the story written last summer by Cary Bates, longtime DC writer.

According to Jim Shooter Bond will be drawn to resemble the current actor playing the movie role, Roger Moore. He also went on to say that while it was unlikely that the series will adapt any of the original James Bond novels, the company could, and probably will, adapt earlier Bond movies.

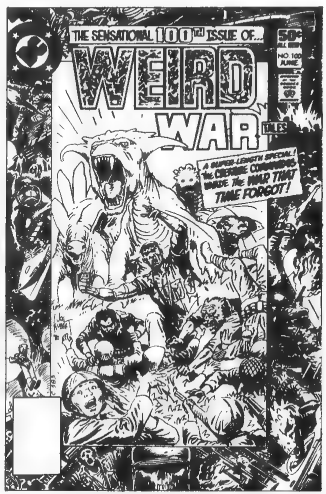
Both the Marvel Super Special and the first issue of the regular comic are scheduled to be released at around the same time that the movie premieres this summer.

Marvel has also decided to pick up the comics option offered by Lucasfilms, Ltd. and will create a regular series around the forthcoming ***RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK***. Archie Goodwin and John Buscema have been appointed the title's writer and artist respectively. The first three issues of the monthly comic will adapt the movie. According to Shooter, Goodwin will then develop the series in the same way that the ***STAR WARS*** is handled: no cast changes can be made on a permenent basis, the characterizations of the principal characters must remain consistent with the movie, and the adventures recounted must be constructed so as not to threaten the continuity of either the current movie or any possible sequels.

Lucasfilm, Ltd. press releases indicate that the movie will be a 1940s period piece recounting the thrilling pulp-like adventures of a heroic soldier-of-fortune.

In a final deal, Marvel also arranged to publish a one-shot comics adaptation of ***DRAGONSLAYER***, the upcoming Paramount/Walt Disney Studios production. John Buscema will provide the pencils.

This special anniversary issue of *WEIRD WAR* combines the book's two current series, as the monster GIs meet the dinosaurs


THE SENSATIONAL 100TH ISSUE OF...
WEIRD WAR
A SUPER-LENGTH SPECIAL!
THE GERMANS COMBINE FORCES WITH THE MEN THAT TIME FORGOT!

CHARLTON BULLSEYE NEWS

Charlton Publications' new ***CHARLTON BULLSEYE*** comic will be released in March 1981. It will feature various types of "theme" issues, although the first issue will be devoted to reintroductions of some of Charlton's 1960 super-hero characters: The Blue Beetle and The Question (both by Dan Reed). Charlton's present policy for ***BULLSEYE*** remains that contributors should submit complete stories, ten pages or less in length, which are completely ready for publication. Payment will be 50 contributor's copies and copyright on the contributor's material (unless Charlton properties are used, as in issue #1).

Charlton is also giving the comics specialty shops first crack at ordering the new comic. Stores can order ***CHARLTON BULLSEYE*** through mid-Febuary on a pre-paid, no-return basis. At the end of Febuary the remainder of the scheduled print run will be reserved for newsstand sales.

NEW VICE-PRESIDENT AT MARVEL

Marvel has created a new position of Vice-President of Publishing to compensate for current publisher Stan Lee's extended absence from the New York area. Michael Z. Hobson, formerly Vice-President of Publishing of the Book Division of Scholastic Book Services, was hired to fill the new position as of January 1, 1981.

According to sources at Marvel, little dramatic change is expected to result from the creation of the new office. Hobson will work out of Stan Lee's old Marvel office and will function as acting publisher since Lee has shifted his attention from overseeing the comics division of Marvel to developing the new Marvel Animation Studio.

MARVEL BLACK AND WHITE MAGAZINE LINE REVAMPED

HULK CANCELLED, HOWARD THE DUCK SHIFTED TO COLOR COMIC

Due to the uproar over the Jim Shooter story in ***THE HULK*** #23, in which Bruce Banner is the victim of a homosexual rape attempt, the Marvel black and white magazine line has been trimmed to just two titles. In a meeting between Jim Shooter, Stan Lee, and Cadence president, Jim Galton, the decision was laid down to cancel ***THE HULK!*** magazine outright with issue #27 and transform ***HOWARD THE DUCK*** back into a regular color comic book (where it once again will be under the eagle-eyed scrutiny of the Comics Code Authority). Only ***SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN*** and ***MARVEL PREVIEW*** (renamed ***BIZARRE ADVENTURES***) will survive the purge. The changes were, in part, motivated by the fear that Marvel's younger readers were being led into buying the black and white magazines due to the presence of popular characters. Since there seemed no easy way to target the magazines, which have featured more mature material than is usually permissable in the comics, to an older audience, the decision was made to cancel the magazines that were causing the problem.

Although Howard the Duck will be losing his magazine, he will be gaining his own quarterly 75¢ color comic. It will feature 48 pages of material. The last duck magazine will be #9.

Marvel, however, does not plan to abandon the black and white magazine format. Neal Adams has been commissioned to design a new look for the line. Jim Shooter explained that the company had decided that titles such as ***SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN*** are ideal subjects for black and white non-code-approved magazines. He is planning to develop another try-out magazine similar to ***BIZARRE ADVENTURES*** to stimulate the creation of new characters that would work as well as Conan does in the black and white format. He does not plan to develop any black and white series around characters that are currently appearing in Marvel's regular comics.

Howard the Duck: back to color comics

NEW DC ASSOCIATE EDITOR SYSTEM

DC has begun a new official system of apprentice editors being trained under experienced editors. This system apparently differs from DC's past-and-present assistant editor classification in that assistant editors, such as E. Nelson Bridwell (assistant editor to Julius Schwartz), serve a secondary yet consistent-for-all magazines role in the production of their senior editor's complete output, while the new associate editors, as the new apprentice position is known, will be fully responsible for the duties on each of their assigned titles, yet their work performance will technically be overseen by their senior editor.

To facilitate interaction between the new editors and their mentors the DC offices are being remodeled and several small offices are being thrown together to provide working areas which the senior editor and his associate editor will share.

Michael Barr, long time freelance writer for both Marvel and DC, will be working as an Associate Editor under Len Wein. He will be responsible for editing ***THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES***, ***WEIRD WAR***, ***THE FLASH***, and ***THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER***. In addition to his writing career, Barr already is partially familiar with his editorial duties since he worked as an Editorial Assistant and Proofreader at DC between 1977-79.

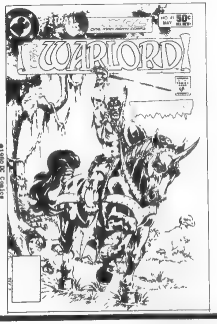
Cary Burkett, the other new Associate Editor, will be working with Dick Giordano. Burkett has been assigned editorial responsibilities on a number of DC's mystery comics including ***GHOSTS***, ***SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE***, and ***THE UNEXPECTED***. Burkett had been an Assistant Editor at DC under Paul Levitz during the 1970s and was lately appointed the regular scripter on ***BATGIRL***, ***NEMESIS***, and the ***SUPERMAN/BATMAN*** feature in ***WORLD'S FINEST***. Despite his editorial workload, Burkett will continue writing these features in the future.

DIAL 'H' NEWS

Don Heck, recently reassigned to the ***"Aquaman"*** back feature in ***ACTION COMICS*** following Carmine Infantino's return to ***THE FLASH***, has taken on the assignment of alternate regular penciller on the new ***"Dial 'H' for Hero"*** feature in ***ADVENTURE COMICS***. Former regular penciller Carmine Infantino will no longer be doing every story, but his work should continue to appear in every issue. There is some chance that Infantino will be resuming his position as penciller on the ***"Adam Strange"*** feature (in ***GREEN LANTERN***), thus effectively reclaiming both of the features that gained him his initial fan acclaim in the 1960s.

SECRETS OF THE FORTRESS

The ***SUPERMAN'S FORTRESS OF SOLITUDE*** tabloid scheduled to be released to coincide with the American premiere of ***SUPERMAN II*** next Spring will feature some rare Ross Andru interior pencils. The story, edited by Len Wein and currently scheduled to be scripted by Roy Thomas, will detail the secrets behind the many momentoes and machines in the Fortress within a storyline dealing with a super-villain's plot to destroy the Earth by planting a time-bomb in the Fortress. DC research ace Nelson Bridwell will be researching the many appearances of the Fortress' collection of memorabilia, and Thomas hopes to reconcile some of the more obvious misrepresentations of those past stories, such as Batman's dinosaur and giant penny regularly commuting to the Fortress from the Batcave.



MARVEL

Marvel's proposed experiment with Romance comics has undergone yet another alteration. Originally conceived as a "straight" love comic in the "style of the Simon and Kirby series," then as a book of super-hero romances, and, just lately, as the plainclothes romances of super-heroes, the book is **now** described as romances set in exotic, fantastic, mythological, or science fiction settings. The material is slated to appear in a future issue of ***BIZARRE ADVENTURES.***

Under writer J. Marc DeMatteis, the ***DEFENDERS*** will change its focus from typical super-heroics to mystery/horror stories. The book will feature guest appearances by Dracula, The Man-Thing, and Satanna. Also, Daimon Hellstrom, The Son of Satan, will become a regular Defender, and another new member, The Gargoyle, will join in issue #94.

Terry Austin will be inking John Byrne's pencils on ***THE FANTASTIC FOUR*** comic book.

Roger Stern has been assigned the task of rewriting Jack Kirby's adaptation of ***THE PRISONER*** TV show. Stern reports that the major conceptual difficulty he has had to face is coming up with some way to script the Kirby material so that it is not the identical story which Steve Englehart and Gil Kane adapted. Since both comics versions of the popular Patrick McGoohan program of the late 1960s were adapting the same episode of it, preventing overlap between the two comics interpretations seems almost impossible. Marvel also announced that the two ***PRISONER*** stories will appear in color when they are finally released.

SPIDER-WOMAN #39 will feature the reappearance of Morgan LeFay.

The ***SPIDER-MAN/SUPERMAN*** team-up book has been completed and is scheduled for an early Spring release. An unexpected development is that the material will also be released in the form of a paperback as well as a special tabloid sized comic.

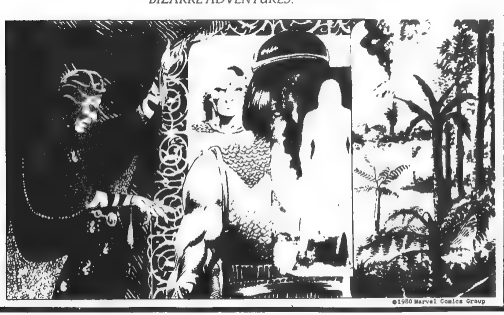
Issue #100 of ***MASTER OF KUNG FU*** will feature a three-part story. The first part will be penciilled by Gene Day and inked by Mike Zeck, while the second and third parts will be drawn be Mike Zeck and inked by Day and probably John Beatty. The story will involve a threat from Fu Manchu in the 1930s, and the story will be set then. Ramifications from that threat plague Shang-Chi in 1981 in the other part of the issue.

The Dominic Fortune color stories will **not** appear in the final issues of the black and white ***THE HULK!*** magazine. Instead they will appear in Marvel's proposed fan magazine, ***MARVEL UNIVERSE***.

Terry Austin, contrary to previous announcements, will not be inking ***DOCTOR STRANGE.***

Due to his assignment as the penciller on the ***JAMES BOND*** comic, Frank Miller will postpone taking over the pencils on ***DR. STRANGE***. Marshall Rogers will sub for him for a few issues.

A sample of the upcoming Kull story in *BIZARRE ADVENTURES.*



DC

Roy Thomas will dialogue Jim Starlin's ***DC COMICS PRESENTS*** featuring Superman and Hawkgirl.

Warlord is featured in ***DC SPECIAL DIGEST*** #10; under the new Mike Grell wraparound cover will be "The Deimos Saga," created from the first ten issues of ***WARLORD*** by editing out the sub-plots. The digest was edited by Laurie Sutton.

GREEN LANTERN #142 and ***143*** feature the Omega Men, a group of alien political refugees turned super-hero team; in that story Green Lantern and Carol Ferris visit Newfoundland. In ***GREEN LANTERN #144***, a major Green Lantern villain will die.

Now that the new Teen Titans have defeated Trigon, their time in future issues will be spent searching for the killers of the original Doom Patrol and battling the Titans of Greek mythology on Paradise Island.

The tabloid filmbook to ***SUPERMAN II*** will be released in the United States in June. It was designed and written by Joe Orlando and Michael Fleisher, who performed similiar duties on the f lmbook to ***SUPERMAN I***.

The Atom and Air Wave will aga n appear in ***ACTION***, alternating as of #522, which will feature. There will be two or three solo sto ies of each character followed by a bridging story, featuring that character and the next.

In ***SUPERMAN FAMILY #208***, E. Nelson Bridwell and Kurt Schaffenberger revive the original

Mr. Mxyztplk in the "Mr. & Mrs. Superman" strip.

Following Jack C. Harris' reassignment to DC's foreign licensing department, Andrew Helfer has been appointed to Harris' former position as Public Relations and Publicity Liason. Helfer was formerly Joe Orlando's assistant editor.

TALES OF THE GREEN LANTERN CORPS finally has an inker: Frank McLaughlin. Edited by Len Wein and Dick Giordano, the three-issue mini-series will be scripted by Len Wein and pencilled by regular ***GREEN LANTERN*** artist Joe Staton.

Roy Thomas' first creation to appear at DC will be a new villain, a human/Yeti crossbreed whose after ego is a skier, and will appear in ***BATMAN #337.*** Gerry Conway will script the story; Jose Luis Garcia-Lopez will pencil it.

MYSTERY IN SPACE, heir to the inventory of DC's late Dollar Comic, ***TIME WARP,*** has been cancelled with issue #117. As with its predecessor, ***MYSTERY IN SPACE***'s inventory material will doubtless be rescheduled for upcoming issues of other DC titles.

George Perez will take over as the regular cover artist on ***GREEN LANTERN***.

Jim Starlin pencils and inks ***DC COMICS PRESENTS #36.*** The story, ***"Whatever Happened to Starman?"*** will conclude that character's adventures from his cancelled series seen in ***ADVENTURE COMICS.*** Paul Levitz, scripter of Starman's late feature, will write his character's final appearance.

SUPERMAN FAMILY and ***WORLD'S FINEST COMICS*** have each gone monthly.

Editor Len Wein has received several new editorial assignments in the wake of Jack C. Harris' move to foreign licensing. Wein inherits ***DIAL 'H' FOR HERO (ADVENTURE COMICS), GREEN LANTERN,*** and ***WORLD'S FINEST COMICS.*** In addition, he will continue to edit ***THE NEW TEEN TITANS, JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA, WONDER WOMAN,*** and the forthcoming ***ALL-STAR SQUADRON.***

JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA #193 and ***WARLORD #48,*** both on sale in May, will feature free 16-page inserts spotlighting two new DC titles. ***JUSTICE LEAGUE*** will contain Roy Thomas' and Rich Buckler's ***ALL-STAR SQUADRON,*** and ***WARLORD*** will feature Thomas' and Ernie Colon's sword-and-sorcery character.

SUPER-FRIENDS, DC's "Justice League for younger children" (as well as being a cult book for many adult readers) has been cancelled with issue #47.

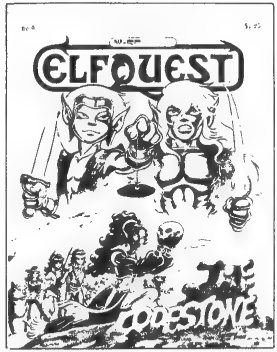
GENERAL

Flying Buttress Publications will be re-releasing the 1946 ***MILTON CANIFF, REMBRANDT OF THE COMIC STRIP.*** It will feature extensive textual revisions by Richard Marschall of the original version by Clark Kinnaird ("John Paul Adams"). It will also feature a new afterword by Caniff and many new illustrations. It will be released in hardcover (signed) and paperback simultaneously, in February 1981.

FUTURE GOLD, Geoffrey Schutt's fanzine of investment advice and rare comics historical articles, has signed a distribution and production contract with New Media/Irjax distributors and New Media Publications.

This will be immediately reflected in the production upgrades of ***FG,*** including color covers and professionally-typeset copy. Although the changeover in production has caused ***FUTURE GOLD***'s August-September issue (#7) to be pushed back to December-January, in the future, the magazine will be maintaining a strict bi-monthly schedule.

Cary Bates' and Gil Kane's new comic strip ***THE LONE RANGER*** for the New York Times Syndicate has been delayed. This is due to a combination of circumstances: the fact that the distributor's showings of the tied-in ***LONE RANGER*** movie met with very low return response; and has been returned for re-editing, thus delaying its release date; and also that Gil Kane has been experiencing some difficulty in meeting the Syndicate's deadlines.



WaRP Graphics, the publishers of ***ELFQUEST,*** announced that issue #9 of the popular title will be delayed slightly in order to allow artist/co-writer Wendy Pini time to complete additional artwork. The issue, entitled ***"The Codestone,"*** has been expanded to 48 pages, 44 of which will be story pages. The additional twelve pages of story over ***ELFQUEST***'s usual 32-page format is due to the Pinis' discovery that "there was just too much story for the usual 32 pages."

Issue #9 chronicles Cutter's and Skywise's adventures as they seek other elves, and Leetah's attempts to locate her husband in order to warn him of some unknown threat. ***ELFQUEST #9*** will appear in late February.

Long-time comics fan artist and commentator Alan "Jim" Hanley was killed in an automobile accident on December 24, 1980. He was forty years old, and is survived by his wife and two daughters. Hanley had been involved in comics fandom since practically its inception, and contributed regularly to ***THE BUYER'S GUIDE.***

December 10, 1980

REVISED MARVEL COMICS TRADE TERMS

Marvel Comics are available directly from the publisher on the terms itemized here. In addition, Marvel Comics are also available through independent periodical wholesalers supplied by the Curtis Circulation Company on certain terms substantially different from those stated here.

Marvel Comics are available on the direct basis stated in this term sheet only to wholesale distributors who resell the comics to other distributors and/or independently owned retail outlets. Wholesale distributors who sell any portion of their comics on a retail basis directly or through affiliated retail outlets must specify on their monthly order forms the number of copies sold on such a retail basis. These retail-sale copies will be billed at a different discount (see below).

1) Effective Date:	1 March 1981
2) Minimum Monthly Order:	$7,500
3) Product Discount:	60% — wholesale 50% — affiliated retail
4) Returns:	All sales are non-returnable. Returned damaged copies will be replaced if possible or a credit given.
5) Billing & Credit:	Invoicing will be weekly with dating 14 days after commencement of the shipping group. Payment is due 30 days from the date of invoice. Credit may be denied to any account upon the determination by Marvel that the account does not meet Marvel's credit standards. Failure to maintain a current account status may result in suspension or termination of service to the account.
6) Order Date:	Orders must be received no later than date appearing on the monthly solicitation sent to each distributor by Marvel.
7) Minimum Order:	100 copies per title per month of each title ordered and orders must be in multiples of 100.
8) Reorders:	Reorders will be accepted after the initial order deadline, but may not be processed until after shipment date and then only if over-run copies are available. Reorders are processed on a first-come, first-served basis and are subject to minimum-order requirements as above, plus .02 per copy processing charge.
9) Packaging:	Orders are shipped in packaging of Marvel's choice. Corrugated cartons (boxes) are available and recommended. There is an extra charge of $.48 per box used.
10) Drop Shipping:	Marvel will drop ship to a distributor's customers provided each shipping point must have a minimum order of $3000 per month (distributor's cost).
11) General:	A. Marvel reserves the right to audit the books and records of its accounts to ascertain that orders correctly reflect the breakdown between affiliated and independently owned retail outlets. B. Marvel reserves the right to modify or amend these terms upon 60 days notice to the distributor. C. Comics sold under these terms may carry on their cover different markings than those comics distributed through Curtis Circulation Company. D. The receipt of any orders from you after 1 March 1981 will signify your acceptance of these terms.
12) New Accounts:	All new account applicants will be required to submit payment with order for three months. 30 days credit may be extended upon the determination of Marvel that the applicant is credit-worthy.

For further information, contact Mike Friedrich, Manager/Direct Sales.

an interview with

LEONARD STARR

LEONARD STARR has been at the top of his profession for nearly two decades. His twenty-two year project, the comic strip ***MARY PERKINS ON STAGE*** has been hailed as both "the best human-interest strip in the field" and "The Great American Comic Strip." It has won several comic strip industry awards.

In 1979, Starr voluntarily discontinued ***ON STAGE*** and began work on a revival of Harold Gray's ***LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE*** strip (now titled simply ***ANNIE***). That has proven to be a great success, both artistically and commercially, and has once again catapulted Starr to "the top of the heap"—a position from which he is never far.

COMICS FEATURE editors Richard Howell and Carol Kalish interviewed Starr (with some assistance from Starr's gracious wife Betty) in October 1980. The interview was edited by both Howell and Starr.

COMICS FEATURE: I know a little about what your art training was: I gather there wasn't too much of it and you weren't too pleased with it. How would ***you*** characterize your art training?

STARR: Let's see... I went to the High School of Music and Art. The classes there were mainly studio practice. You didn't get very much instruction ***per se***. You just drew and then the teacher would say "good" or "not good." I was a little worried...I was going to go to Pratt when I graduated—I was good in school, I was one of the best—but I thought when I got to Pratt the instruction would be much better than what I had been getting. That didn't prove to be the case. Oddly enough, they pretty much just had studio practice even at Pratt. I was astounded by how much we all improved by the end of the year just by application, just by standing around and drawing. But in terms of instruction, again, there was virtually none of it.

I had a year at Pratt. During that year I started working on comics.

CF: That would be comic books...?

STARR: Yes, comic books. There was a notice on the bulletin board from a company called Famous Funnies—no, not Famous Funnies. What were they called... Funnies Incorporated. They were a production outfit for various comic book companies. Marvel, called Goodman Publications then, I think, was one, and there were a couple of smaller ones. Funnies Inc. produced the books for them. They were a shop.

I did backgrounds, that sort of thing, after school. By the end of the year I was doing the books. This was during the war so they were short on artists. They took a chance on their new artists. The stuff wasn't very good, but they needed the material so they bought it. They didn't pay very much for it either, so I guess everybody made out pretty well.

Then I went to Pratt at night the second year because I was working pretty much full-time. The instruction at night was even worse than it was during the day. By that time I knew what I needed and they just weren't giving it to me. So I quit school and started working full-time. I did things like ***"Don Winslow"***, ***"The Human Torch"***, ***"Sub-Mariner"***, and...well, that kind of thing. Those were the days when if you really worked on the job they got annoyed. They were selling like 98% of the print run and all they wanted was for the artists to fill the books as quickly as possible. The guys in the army would buy anything. So I would pencil eight full pages of The Sub-Mariner one day and ink them the next.

And so, even if I knew what I was doing, it couldn't have been much, but they liked it—well, they ***bought*** it. At any rate, it also had a deleterious effect on my own advancement. I wasn't learning a hell of a lot, although I was learning how to do it fast. But I kept doing it, and doing it, and doing it, and when I was about twenty-eight, everytime I tried to take my work a notch higher, it would take me something like three times as long to do. So I realized there were tremendous gaps in my information and I went back to study with Frank Reilly, whom some illustrators I knew had touted to me very highly. He knew what he was doing. Frank Reilly was, without question, the best art teacher I ever saw. He was a pedagogue: you didn't have any discussions or debates on artistic merit, or aesthetics, or whatever.

CF: He was right all the time?

STARR: Well, he taught you the nuts and bolts. His position was that you could not teach creativity. You're either creative or not. If you were, then with what he taught you, you'd go in your own direction; if not, at least you'd know what you were doing. You'd at least be competent. To this day, I don't find any argument with that position. I never left a ***single*** class with Reilly without knowing more than I knew when I went in. Practically a miracle in my experience with Art Schools. His theory was that there are only about ten mistakes the student could make but they could make them over and over again, so they seem like a hundred possible errors. But if you eliminated one area of error, the student would actually eliminate ten per cent of the mistakes he'd been making. And he was

"...I WAS APPREHENSIVE ABOUT IT, BECAUSE EVERY THEATRE STRIP THAT HAD BEEN TRIED BEFORE HAD FAILED."

right—he was just a terrific teacher!

That was also about the end of my comic book days. I was doing a lot of advertising at the time. I was doing pocket book covers...

CF: This was in the middle 1950s?

STARR: About then, yes. I was doing advertising, some illustration. Oddly enough, I wasn't making as much money doing the "tonier" stuff as I had with comics. So I thought I'd try to sell a strip. I worked up four or five ideas, and I took them to King Features one by one, and, I think, Post-Hall. King Features loved everything I brought them, but each one wasn't quite right. They told me to come back whenever I had any new ideas, by all means. The next idea I had was to take all the stuff I had submitted to King Features up to the News Syndicate. (Laughs) [Starr is referring to the New York News Syndicate]. Maurice R. Reilly, who was president at that time, hit on ***ON STAGE***. There wasn't a theatre strip at the time, but I was apprehensive about it, because every theatre strip that had been tried before had failed. I certainly didn't want to fly in the face of a jinx. And a theatre strip is tricky to do, because the locales seem to be limited; backstage you have ropes, props, lights, and not much else. But I thought if I handled it from a human interest point of view, I might be able to make it work. And it worked fine. The strip went very well; it lasted for twenty-three years. It lasted well enough, actually, until all the story strips started failing. It was still doing all right when I ended it, but I could see the handwriting on the wall. It was very depressing, too. I think most of the story strip guys are very depressed with what's been happening. It's very hard to work up any enthusiasm in yourself in this kind of atmosphere. You like to be enthusiastic about your work.

Then the syndicate [The Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate] suggested ***ANNIE*** to me, and since it seemed very remote from anything I had ever done—the art style was so different—I thought I would just write it... up until the last week of drawing ***ON STAGE***. I was doing eye lashes, teeth, pupils, fingernails, etc., and I thought "Gee, ***ANNIE*** can't be any tougher than this!" So I thought I would give it a whack, and I went through Gray's stuff. His 1930s style was the most appealing to me. That was when the drawing had the most charm, the most animation, and Annie, herself, was the most attractive. When Harold Gray died, his drawing had become kind of grotesque, and when Tex Blaisdell took it over, he naturally took over from where Gray had left off. I guess if they had been watching it closely, the syndicate should have steered him back to the 1930s look, but they didn't. Syndicates, generally, do not steer you a hell of a lot. You succeed or fail on your own. You get very little direction from them, and that may be good.

Essentially, what a comic strip is, is a projection of the artist's personality. He's putting forth a persona which the reader either buys or does not buy, and I don't know if editorial direction would help that a hell of a lot.

But anyway, they didn't direct Tex, and things began going steadily downhill. When you start off with a character who's grotesque, and it's not your character to begin with, it can only get more grotesque. But then, of course, they had the phenomenon of the show, and suddenly Annie was all over the place again. It's probably the most expensive theatrical property in the country today. I think they sold Columbia the rights to the show [for the upcoming ***ANNIE*** movie] for ten million dollars, and the syndicate sold all other theatrical rights to Columbia as well, for another very large sum. It looked like things were going to happen with the strip, and I thought I would enjoy being a part of it. So I studied the various directions that Gray took with the strip: part political, part mystic, part adventure, part Dickens. I thought that the contemporary strain, keeping it in tune with what was going on now, with what was happening at this moment, would be the best way to go. I wrote about three weeks of continuity and checked it with Bob Reed and Don Michel, President and Vice President of the syndicate. The material was kind of strong, but I decided that if they didn't go with it, I wasn't going to do the strip. But they liked it, and so we were off. One of the nice things about it was that it happened very fast. There was no waiting for reactions, no waiting for the phone to ring. Within three months the strip was out on the stands, and that very rarely happens in this business. Usually, it's like six months going from salesmen to executives to branch offices—it just drags on and on.

CF: I think that it was barely two months between the end of ***ON STAGE*** and the beginning of ***ANNIE***.

STARR: Getting the style was the next thing I had to do. For the first three or four weeks of ***ANNIE*** I traced. I traced Gray's Annie, just to get it in my fingers. Of course, you can't do that forever, because it's very time-consuming. Tracing is harder than just drawing. And also, side characters came in that Gray hadn't invented. Once you're working on your own stories, you have to develop your own characters, your own strain. Also, I couldn't use his compositions, because he had those giant panels. He had four panels going clear across the top of the tabloid page. It's more restricted now, so I had to bring the compositions up closer, and I was a little concerned about whether the Gray-style heads would survive the "close" look. If you have them in middle background, then the round eyes and everything else work perfectly well. Bringing them up closer, you know, you've got potato-chip eyes, and you wonder about them. I was surprised to find out how expressive I could make them. The side characters, most of the side characters, they have the round eyes, too, and they work. So now I wonder why I was doing all those eyelashes...(Laughs) All those years of fingernails!

CF: All those details!

STARR: Yes!

CF: I think that part of the expressiveness is in the body language,

too, which you have a better grasp of than Gray did.

STARR: Well, Gray is deceptive. If you check his 1930s stuff, you'll find a great deal more than you remember. You seem to remember Annie standing with just her hand on her hip, or with her hands behind her back, or walking, or whatever, but Gray had a much greater range than I remembered. Then he sort of lost it, or he became uninterested. You know, doing a thing for forty years, it's very hard to maintain a whole-hearted approach to your work.

CF: Have you any other information about your formative years in the comics shops? We had not known that you'd worked for Timely, but we have many of the old Prize (S&K) Romance comics with your work in them.

STARR: Timely? Which one was that?

CF: That was what turned into Marvel Comics.

STARR: Yes. Well, I guess at the time I was doing comic books, I was doing about fifteen pages a week—and whatever came in, I did. I did everything from prehistoric stuff to science fiction, and all the things in between. Costume stuff. I did some pirate things, some space stuff, romance, and westerns. Script came in and you did it.

CF: Do you know who wrote them? Did you ever have any contact with the writer?

STARR: No, the writer didn't get billing in those days. The ***artist*** didn't get billing in those days. Sometimes they signed them, some times they didn't.

CF: It was more like you were a cog in a big production wheel?

STARR: Just about, yes. Although there were guys that had a better reputation in the field than others. I guess we got the cream of the stuff. Well, there was no advantage, really, to being one of the more highly-regarded artists, because they gave you "dead" stories. They figured you could liven them up. They would give the better stories to the mediocre guys, because those stories were inherently dramatic, but if they had what they considered a lemon, they would give it to the better guys because they could bring something to it that the writing didn't have. We worked on a lot of dreary stuff.

I didn't do too many continuing characters—I don't know why, though. I did some from time to time. I think, with the continuing characters, they wanted a sort of interchangeable art look—which was very clever, actually. It's very hard to look at Marvel Comics and tell who did what. And, of course, if you have to produce as much stuff as they do, that interchangeable look, I think, is desirable.

CF: Did you ink a job for Marvel about five years ago—a Frank Robbins job? ***(ADVENTURE INTO FEAR #27.)***

STARR: Yes.

WELL... YOUR UNCLE IS A TOP PROFESSIONAL, AND THAT'S WHAT I NEED... BUT HOW DO I KNOW THAT YOU AREN'T JUST A PROFESSIONAL NEPHEW?!
I BEG YOUR PARDON?

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CF: Was that because you felt like doing a comic again?

STARR: No, no. I got in a bind. I was between several things, and something come due, some payment or something, and it was either a matter of selling some bonds or getting some fast money somewhere. So, it came in handy, but, it was a lot of work for the money.

CF: Now, we've heard part of the genesis of the ***ON STAGE*** strip, and it seems that it wasn't the one you would have picked, out of the samples.

STARR: The one I liked best was about a medical missionary. And it was about, five years before, well, or three or four years before the Tom Dooley thing. So it would have hit into that, and the thing had more scope, it had travel, it had different locales, it had suffering and disease (always very good), and native women of various nationalities, which would have been fun to do—the love interest, that kind of thing. I just thought it had more... you know, any comic strip should be capable of infinite extension if possible. And you can do that with a detective; you just get new cases, you know, or with science fiction. Some professions are really like that, and a medical missionary is a very good idea for a character, simply because of the scope that it has. It covers many possibilities in terms of things that are commercially attractive. Life and death... well, you know... sickness and squalor. Always a big seller.

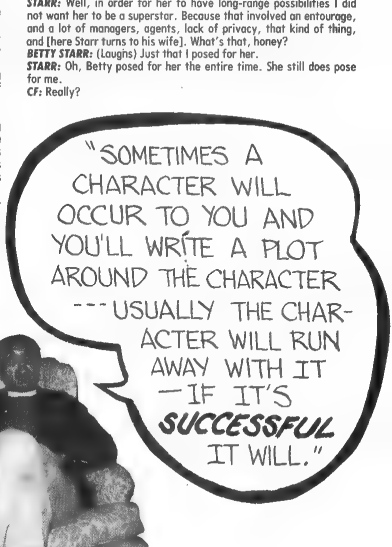
CF: Always makes sure your audience knows there's someone worse off than they are. Was the Mary Perkins character based on anyone you knew, specifically, or a combination? This means either visually or in terms of her personality.

STARR: Well, in order for her to have long-range possibilities I did not want her to be a superstar. Because that involved an entourage, and a lot of managers, agents, lack of privacy, that kind of thing, and [here Starr turns to his wife]. What's that, honey?

BETTY STARR: (Laughs) Just that I posed for her.

STARR: Oh, Betty posed for her the entire time. She still does pose for me.

CF: Really?


"SOMETIMES A CHARACTER WILL OCCUR TO YOU AND YOU'LL WRITE A PLOT AROUND THE CHARACTER --- USUALLY THE CHARACTER WILL RUN AWAY WITH IT — IF IT'S SUCCESSFUL IT WILL."

STARR: Oh, sure, sure. She has to wear a red wig, and white stockings, which she doesn't mind, but having those poker chips in her eyes, that's a little tough (general laughter)... but, where Mary was in my mind was about where Janet Leigh was; you were always glad to see her, but you'd never go out of your way to see her. She was very competent, never less than first rate, and yet, she never had the status of an Elizabeth Taylor, or whomever. It would be very limiting... you know, what can she do? Buy diamonds?

CF: Another big adventure.

CF: Her nineteenth husband...

STARR: Yes. So I figured Mary as being a very competent professional, and yet not in that elevated status where all you can do is hide.

CF: By the same token, you didn't want Mary to have what would have evolved into a star's personality?

STARR: Right.

CF: That would limit her involvement with the supporting characters.

STARR: Yes. The actors that are easiest to deal with are the business-like ones. And oddly enough, they're mostly English. They come in, they're prepared. They have a vast experience with repertory, they know their jobs, and they don't have to psyche themselves up into it. They work mainly externally, through technique, and so they don't have to do push-ups or get into the mood.

BETTY STARR: Mary Perkins was very interesting because she was so available to whatever happened. She was a very pretty girl, so she always had men possibly interested, but these men gave her encouragement...

STARR: Yes.

BETTY STARR: ...who would happen to see her and be attracted to her. She's still a theatre person, but she's pulled into various personal adventures. There was one where a man steals her away and puts her into a house in the country where he locks her in a room because of a morbid romantic attachment he's developed for her...

STARR: That was also an attempt at a gothic feel, but also, you had to create situations for Mary where she could get into that sort of thing... So I guess I handled it pretty much as if she were a nurse, or any other kind of solid professional: someone who knew her job, and did it, and wasn't a pain in the ass about it. No big moods, no temprament. She was interested in art, but wasn't going to spend half her rehearsal time discussing it.

CF: How did you come up with the idea of using an actress as a subject for a comic strip?

STRR: Well, it was the time of the soap operas. They were going very well. And it was a profession, really, that wasn't current.

CF: It was a vacuum to be filled?

STARR: Yes. Meanwhile, I knew a bit about the theatre. A lot of my friends in Music and Art had gone into show business so I knew the milieu, and the rest of it I researched—and apparently successfully, because people like Hal Prince thought that I had been *in* the theatre. Apparently my background material was sufficiently accurate, without over-glamorizing it. The nuts and bolts of it were pretty much all there.

CF: Without being too technical for a general audience.

STARR: Well, you have to be careful of that.

CF: What methods did you use to achieve the varied characterizations of the supporting characters in the strip? Did it come out of different aspects of how you saw yourself as being, or was it drawn on from outside experience?

STARR: It usually comes out of the requirements of the story. The genesis of the story is always sort of mysterious. Sometimes, the plot will come to you, and you create the characters to fit the plot. Sometimes a character will occur to you and you'll write a plot around the character. In both instances, usually the character will run away with it—if it's **successful**, it will. Whenever I have a story and I don't know what the middle of it is going to be, I have to know the punchline to know where the story is going to go. And in many instances, by the time I'm three-quarters of the way through it, I'll have to change the punchline because the character has gone off in its own directions. That's good. It's usually better than fitting it into what has now become an artificial format, a plot requirement that you thought was attractive in the first place.

...AND TO LAUNCH OUR EXPERIMENT, MARY PERKINS HAS GRACIOUSLY AGREED TO BE THE FIRST TO DECORATE OUR ENTERTAINMENT DESK! WELCOME, MARY.
THANK YOU, HOWARD!
©1981 Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate

"...I HANDLED IT PRETTY MUCH AS IF [MARY] WERE A NURSE, OR ANY OTHER KIND OF SOLID PROFESSIONAL: SOMEONE WHO KNEW HER JOB, AND DID IT, AND WASN'T A PAIN IN THE ASS ABOUT IT."

...THAT'S QUITE DRAMATIC, DIRK. FEW WOMEN COULD FAIL TO BE MOVED BY IT... FOR AN ACTRESS, IT MAY BE IMPOSSIBLE!...
THEN...BEFORE I LEAVE... DO YOU SUPPOSE I COULD... WE COULD...
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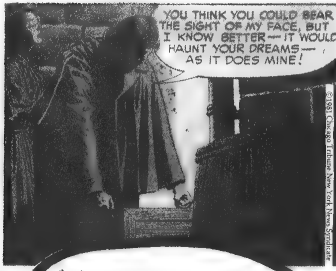

YOU THINK YOU COULD BEAR THE SIGHT OF MY FACE, BUT I KNOW BETTER—IT WOULD HAUNT YOUR DREAMS—AS IT DOES MINE!
©1985 Chester Brown, New York Times Syndicate

"ODDLY ENOUGH, JOHNNY Q, MAXIMUS, AND BOOMER WERE THE LEAST REALISTIC OF THE CHARACTERS, AND THEY WERE THE ONES THAT MADE THE GREATEST IMPRESSION."

So there's no real answer to that. God only knows where plots come from. You just hope they appear when you need them.

CF: Okay, when ***ON STAGE*** began, it was more of a typical human-interest strip in that it had returning characters that Mary got involved with, and then they'd wander out of the continuity for a while, and then they'd come back. People like Johnny Q and Maximus.

STARR: I didn't do that with too many characters.

CF: No, not at all. And when the strip got rolling, in the early-to-middle 1960s, that part of it phased out quite a bit.

STARR: Pretty much.

CF: And I think that with the possible exception of X. Boomer Bailey, those two were the last major supporting characters the strip had.

STARR: I think really, they were the only three I ever repeated, and I think I repeated those because a story idea occurred to me wherein they would fit. In Maximus' case, he was very popular, and so there was a demand to bring him back, and so I devised other ways to go with him. He's fun to work with. Oddly enough, Johnny Q, Maximus, and Boomer were the least realistic of the characters, and they were the ones that made the greatest impression—sort of a lesson there—but they actually weren't what the strip was about.

CF: So you actually had no intention of building up a large supporting cast, and keeping the strip rolling around them like Caniff does?

STARR: No, no—it sort of went in its own direction.

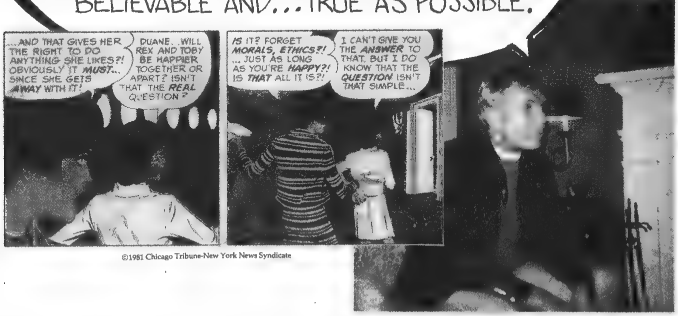
If you're working well, by the time you're three-quarters of the way through a story, your mind starts, unbidden, to work on a new story and puts in bits and pieces of things that will go into it. By the time you're finished, you know where to go with the next one. When that doesn't happen, it's pretty rough, because you're working on the end of the previous story and you have to actually sit down and dope out a new story at the same time. And, sometimes that will work, and sometimes it won't. One of the most successful stories I did was one where I had absolutely no idea where I was going. That was the one with Vanna, an ingenue in a play that Mary was in. All I had in mind was that she escalated her way up the ladder sexually. She started with the stage manager, then moved up to the director, and then to the backer. That was all I had, and as I started working on it, I had no idea of where I was going. Vanna wasn't very talented, but she was a natural mimic. So, what she did was just ape what Mary did. Soon she had the director as a boyfriend, and then ultimately the backer. She kept being pushed to the forefront, ultimately threatening Mary's starring role, which evolved very naturally into a duel on stage between her and Mary. Well, that was very difficult to work, because the format is so small, my proscenium is really a very tiny one in which to bring a sequence like that off, but it seemed to work, everybody liked it. Theatre people thought that it was absolutely accurate in terms of the upstaging business Mary resorted to and all that. And, ah... I liked it. The resolution had a real punchline, yet I had absolutely no idea of where I was going to go with it when I started. Other times, I have no idea of where it's gonna go, and it goes nowhere. (Laughs) It just sort of ends!

CF: We touched on this briefly before: do you think that ***ON STAGE*** expressed any particular view of either life or people, some message that it carried with it?

STARR: No, ah, I would hope that was accurate in terms of the personalities of the people it depicted.

Very few writers that I know, or have read about, enjoy writing. They have to really drag themselves up to the typewriter, and that blank page there is just absolutely deadly. The only writer I ever read about, there may be others, but the only one I know of is Arthur Miller... He can't wait to get to the typewriter in the morning, maybe because he has a message to give the world. Messages are very chancy, though. They all-too-readily turn into lectures which can be very boring to an audience. What I mainly hope to be is entertaining. And within that, I try to make the emotional content of the characters as believable and, if you will, as true as possible, so that the machinations of the plot are convincing to the reader. A point of view may come out of it, but I never examine it. There *is* an overall feel to ***ON STAGE***, but it would take me a long time to analyze what it is myself. Still, it's inevitable that one's work expresses one's own view of the world.

"WHAT I MAINLY HOPE TO BE IS ENTERTAINING, AND WITHIN THAT, I TRY TO MAKE THE EMOTIONS AND CONTENT OF THE CHARACTERS AS BELIEVABLE AND...TRUE AS POSSIBLE."


...AND THAT GIVES HER THE RIGHT TO DO ANYTHING SHE LIKES?! OBVIOUSLY IT MUST... SINCE SHE GETS AWAY WITH IT!
DUANE...WILL REX AND TOBY BE HAPPIER TOGETHER OR APART? ISN'T THAT THE REAL QUESTION?
IS IT? FORGET MORALS, ETHICS?! ...JUST AS LONG AS YOU'RE HAPPY?! IS THAT ALL IT IS?!
I CAN'T GIVE YOU THE ANSWER TO THAT, BUT I DO KNOW THAT THE QUESTION ISN'T THAT SIMPLE...

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CF: Whenever the ***ON STAGE*** characters started to examine, say the moral bases of whatever they're going into, it always trailed off on some ambiguous note, so one got the feeling that the writer wasn't trying to hit you over the head with things, and was just raising these different aspects of the questions through the characters.

STARR: Yes, I thought that was usually best.

CF: Character writing is especially difficult—for writers in any medium, and you wrote twenty-three years of human interest character studies in ***ON STAGE.*** To make that feat more of one, at least half of the characters involved, including the strip's major protagonist, were women. Did you find it any more difficult writing your female characters than your male characters?

STARR: No, but men writing female characters is slippery ground anyhow. My personal perception of the male-female relationship is that women have requirements that men have absolutely no knowledge of, and men have requirements that women have absolutely no knowledge of, and somehow they meet in the middle, leading to mysteries on both sides, and they make it work somehow. I think the women's lib thing has certainly been very good in a very practical sense; certainly women should be paid the same amount, for the same job as men are. Emotionally, socially, I think it's probably caused more harm than good—for women. It hasn't changed men's lives all that much, but I think it's left women with cravings they didn't know they had, opened up vistas that they don't know how to fill. It's just as rotten for men, really. A man's life is not all that great. I think the best thing in Nancy Friday's book on male sexuality is the statement that no boy grows up dreaming of becoming a good provider, and, that's ultimately what they grow up to be if they're ***successful*** in their male role. I'm sure the female role is just as unfair. We just make the best of what our circumstances are, whatever the conditions.

CF: Getting back to a previous subject: Do you have any particular favorite stories out of the whole ***ON STAGE*** run? You mentioned the one with Vanna in the middle 1960s...

STARR: Yes, I liked that one, but I don't know if it's because it was an exceptionally great story... or because I didn't have any idea of how it was going to turn out myself...

CF: Or because it was so well received by so many people...

STARR: Yes. Well, one of the last stories that I wrote I liked an awful lot. In that one, there was a famous theatrical family, like the Lunts...

CF: That was excellent.

STARR: Thank you. It seemed to me that that worked out okay; also it left a question that I, myself didn't have the answer to (which I liked). That was: should they tell the boy that the man he knew as his father was not his real father, and would it do anybody any good?

CF: And would it do anybody any harm at that point?

STARR: Yes. The omniscient view, wherein the writer knows and tells the reader the complete life history of all his characters, which then become the underpinnings of their subsequent actions, can work very well in a novel where there's more room for exposition, but it doesn't work too well in a comic strip—the form is too tight—and I've never been too comfortable with that method for myself, anyway. I prefer encountering a fictional character in much the same way I'd meet a stranger at a party, or at work or whatever. One is first aware of physical appearance. Then, because of what he or she says and does, you begin to form further impressions—mostly subconscious—of that person, favorable or unfavorable. What he or she is wearing says something to you. If you visit that person's home the selection of decor adds still more data—a girl who has opted for Japanese decor and sleeps on a tatami mat tells you something different from a

girl who has frilly curtains at the window and Teddy Bears all over the bed—and tells it to you without a word of dialogue. If the girl who sleeps on a tatami mat also wears frilly, ultra-feminine clothes it tells you still another thing. But what? I don't know. I know nothing about my character's inner life beyond the data I've supplied to the readers, and if the reader's reactions to the characters vary, that's all right.

We've all been in a group where a mutual acquaintance was being discussed. He's disliked by some, liked by others, others have mixed emotions or don't care one way or the other. The discussion can get pretty hot because our own value systems are being engaged. Similarly, if a fictional character's external characteristics are presented believably to the reader, they'll be engaged in a like manner, each in his or her own way. And by "believably," I don't necessarily mean "realistically." Some of the most enduring characters of popular fiction are not particularly "realistic"—Sherlock Holmes, Tarzan, James Bond—but their creators have constructed them in such a way that the reader believes... or at least suspends belief... in them sufficiently to become engaged, and that's the most you can hope for.

CF: We wanted to get on tape at least one of your stories about the battles to keep ***ON STAGE*** in certain papers in certain places at certain times.

STARR: Not much to say about it; in some cases it'd work, in some cases it didn't. There was one instance, I think in South Carolina. The editor dropped it, and it got a tremendous response. He printed the letters, the columnists in the paper wrote about it, and the editor didn't reinstate it, saying what the readers want is not what I want, and I'm the editor. So, sometimes, you just can't beat it. And yet, it's part of the game. You don't let it destroy you, and when you survive it, you don't let it buoy you up. It's all see-sawing all the time, anyhow.

CF: Well, it didn't seem to be based on any particular thing you could avoid in the future?

STARR: No.

CF: To stop losing other papers, or to gain them?

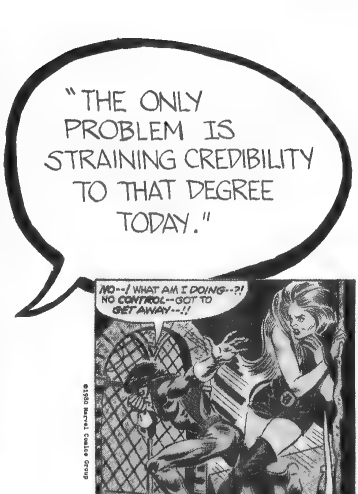
STARR: I don't know that there ever is. There's no formula that you can follow; if there were, everybody would be following it. Since you're working in a different story with every sequence, you've got to go in different directions—you can't keep writing the same story. Although, I can remember one letter about a sequence, a reader said, "I didn't like the story because I never read it before!" (Laughs) And I remember once I was writing a television show, and the producer was explaining to me what he wanted, and what he was saying was—don't go too far afield here, and there are good things to hit, and don't do this, and so forth. And I said, "In other words, you want it original, but familiar." And he said, "Exactly!... and that's exactly what I'm going to tell ***all*** my writers. ***Original, but familiar*** is ***exactly*** what I want!" (Laughs)

CF: We understand you had a lot of, um, very strong response from your ***ON STAGE*** audience on occasion, especially among the theatre people.

STARR: Not only among the theatre people. All the response was very favorable. The fans I have are very solid, and very loyal, and very responsive, and the problem with it was they wrote these very penetrating, very erudite letters and it's very difficult to answer fan mail. So it would make me guilty, you know, for always being far, far behind in responding. There's just no time. I have to do my own research, and so I'm always way behind in my reading, and just the physical production of the strip takes like sixty hours per week, and so I'm always right on the deadline. To take time out to answer a thoughtful letter thoughtfully—there just isn't any time for it! If eventually I do get to it, it could be months, years later. "Remember the letter you wrote me in 1940?" Well, that's kind of silly, so it's very bothersome.

CF: How far ahead of the print date do you work?

STARR: Well, uh, the engravers have put their foot down, and so we've all got to be nine weeks ahead. When I started ***ANNIE***, for example, it was done so quickly, I was only about six weeks ahead. So, all of a sudden, within a month, I had to pick up three weeks, and so


"THE ONLY PROBLEM IS STRAINING CREDIBILITY TO THAT DEGREE TODAY."
NO--! WHAT AM I DOING--?! NO CONTROL--GOT TO GET AWAY--!!
NO, MICHAEL--!
©1980 Tom Orzechowski

it was double-time all the way. That was rough.

CF: You had less than nine weeks actually to get the whole strip ready for them?

STARR: Just about. Plus finishing up the last of ***ON STAGE***, and some other stuff. A juggling act. (laughs) It's a peculiar life! And even worse, most cartoonists tend to be very gregarious types, yet they lead these hermetic existences, and so they've got these two things pushing against each other, it makes them a little flaky. You see cartoonists at a party, and it's like they busted outta stir, they have to drink all the booze, dance every dance, kiss all the girls—'cause tomorrow they're back in their cells! (Laughs)

CF: You do all your writing and pencils and inks yourself, as well as the research?

STARR: Except for the backgrounds. I lay in the backgrounds, and my accomplice, Frank Bolle, Jr., does the detail work.

CF: Has that varied through the years? Has somebody else always been doing that?

STARR: Yes. There's no way I could do, well, ***ON STAGE***. There was no way I could do all the detail it required.

CF: The very realistic backgrounds.

STARR: Plus doing all the very realistic figures.

CF: And research.

STARR: All of that. There was just no way.

CF: If you had known when you were doing the last ***ON STAGE*** story that it was going to be "the last ***ON STAGE*** story," would it have been a different story?

STARR: Probably, probably. I didn't know it was going to be the last ***ON STAGE*** story until the middle of it... and I cut it three or four weeks shorter than an average story. I had to end it at that date if I was going to do ***ANNIE***.

I... I FEEL AS THOUGH A GREAT WEIGHT HAS BEEN REACHED FROM ME...BUT LEFT ME WITH A GREAT HOLE IN MY MIDDLE...
SARA...WE THINK WE CONTROL OUR LIVES, BUT DO WE?...
...WHEN YOU AND I MET, OUR CAREERS WERE NOTHING MUCH. TOGETHER WE ACHIEVED HEIGHTS THAT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BEYOND US SEPARATELY ...BUT DID WE KNOW THAT THEN?
NO... HOW COULD WE...
...SO THEN – FOR REASONS MYSTERIOUS EVEN TO YOU, YOU DID SOMETHING TOTALLY UNCHARACTERISTIC OF YOU... AND THE RESULT WAS KRYPTON... WHO'S GIVEN US ONLY JOY EVERY DAY OF HIS LIFE – SO WHAT CAN WE KNOW?..

"IT SEEMED TO ME THAT THAT WORED OUT OKAY; ALSO, IT LEFT A QUESTION THAT I MYSELF DIDN'T HAVE THE ANSWER TO (WHICH I LIKED)."

CF: How about the other occasions through the years when assistants have done anything other than the backgrounds?

STARR: Early on, I had someone laying out, 'cause even when I was doing ***ON STAGE***, I had a big load of advertising, and other stuff to do, so for the first two or three years, someone else was laying it out and I would have continued that way, but it became impractical. It really needs a production line, to do it properly without having it use up my whole life. A secretary would be nice.

BETTY STARR: Did you mention that Frank Bolle, that your godson was doing backgrounds?

STARR: Yes. Frank Bolle... not Junior, actually. His full name is Frank Leonard Bolle... is my godson.

CF: Oh, kind of keeping it all in the family?

STARR: Yes, it just kind of worked out that way, and I was very, very pleased. He's very good.

CF: We were talking to Archie Goodwin a few weeks ago, and we asked him which sequences in ***ON STAGE*** he was involved with. And he said, "Well, I don't know if you'd actually call it involved in." He told us that what used to happen was that you would give him a story sequence, sometimes a whole week, sometimes individual days, and he'd write it all, and he'd bring it up to you, and you'd say, "Well, this is okay, but this should be punchier, and this transition should work a little better," and then it would get totally rewritten, and Archie said, "Well, you know, he was right!"

STARR: Well, it was an attempt to get ahead on a sequence and see if I could get some time off, and what happened was pretty much what Archie said. It was taking me longer to do that than to write it myself, and it was costing me besides. So, it didn't work. No fault of Archie's. Being an honest man he was trying to do it my way but there simply wasn't enough time for him to work into it. Originally, I had not intended to write the script myself. I never wanted to write, don't now, never cared for it. But I never could find a writer to do it the way I wanted it done. And so, here it is, twenty-five years later ...(Laughs)

CF: And you're still writing your own stuff!

BETTY STARR: Still looking for someone!

CF: And even worse, you're branching out and writing for other people!

STARR: Well, it was sort of a natural outgrowth. I never went looking for any other kind of writing, but a call would come in, the price was right, and so I'd do it.

CF: Well, ***ANNIE*** is kinda what you're doing now, and you briefly described that the syndicate pretty much called you in. What was the background of the ***ANNIE*** strip? Did the syndicate just decide to revive it and present you with the assignment?

STARR: It was the show. It was the success of the show. It just seemed a shame to have what was one of the three most popular strips in American cartoon history—the other two being ***DICK TRACY*** and ***BLONDIE***—to not be in the papers when it once again become a giant property...

CF: It was in reprints at that time?

STARR: It was in reprints at the time.

CF: Very low circulation?

STARR: Well, it was doing all right. It had around a hundred papers. That's not bad. And, they wanted to bring it up to date, to give it a contemporary look, or as contemporary as it could be, and, since it is such a valuable property; they wanted an experienced hand on it. And so, we discussed it, it was a very, very, astounding proposal. I would not have come to me. (laughs) Simply because I wouldn't have thought of myself in that connection. So, I examined it, and thought there ***could*** be a way to go with it. It was really a snap decision. And it was also a matter of either standing still with ***ON STAGE*** or being involved with a project which could go up. If the thing is popping, it's easier to work. It's easier to get up in the morning, it's easier to get to the board, working with an air of enthusiasm is much more pleasant, since you have to do it anyhow.

BETTY STARR: But I do think that you also have a very particular, definite point of view that will carry through, now, that's easily identifiable.

STARR: Well, I think what the syndicate's point of view was that they wanted a reactionary paranoid. (Laughs)

BETTY STARR: (Laughs) I didn't want to say that!

CF: So that's the real you?

STARR: Apparently when I wasn't looking, I'd turned into a cranky old man! (Laughs) And they thought, "Ah-ha!"

CF: The perfect person!

STARR: Yes! Well, apparently, I do have a point of view, even though it's kind of vague to myself. But, there's no doubt, even to me, that the run of ***ON STAGE*** was the result of a single entity. And the same thing holds true for ***ANNIE***. Gray's stamp was all over it.

BETTY STARR: Yes, but you see, I think simply in doing ***ON STAGE***, Mary Perkins was not really that far from this particular ***ANNIE*** set-

up, because she was always trying to do the right thing...

STARR: She was conservative in that she wasn't especially flamboyant. She was the idealized version of what a human being should be. She was practical, she was fair, she had compassion, she wasn't a pushover, although from time to time, she'd get suckered into situations...

BETTY STARR: So why is that different from...

STARR: Well, it's not a conservative point of view. Harold Gray was very conservative politically. Which I am not, although neither do I veer too far to the left. Still and all, many of the points of view of the left, are very good for Annie. The left will find out that they're selling medicines to the Third World which are killing people in the United States, so they're unloading them on countries that can't be choosers. You're only going to find this in ***MOTHER JONES. UNITED STATES NEWS AND WORLD REPORT*** is not going to tell you these things. And yet, that's very good for Annie. I have no plans for using that, but certainly, I have explored the literature of the left, in order to see what the balance of conservative and liberal attitudes are in the country.

CF: Do you kind of see Annie as a twelve-year-old version of Mary Perkins?

STARR: No, no.

CF: She's a completely different character?

STARR: Yeah. Annie is an archetype. Annie is, is... we were trying to find a capsule description of Annie when we were working on it, and the salesmen had come up with, what was it, "virtuous"? And that's not what Annie is. She's really "indominable." She survives, and what's nice about her is that she's not a whiner, she takes life as it comes, she handles it as effectively as she can within her limitations, she doesn't mind pitching in with the work, she doesn't take any nonsense when it's offered to her—a very attractive character. I wish I were that way! (Laughs) I can be swayed in many directions, but Annie just does very constructive things, and essentially survives life, which is a tricky business. And when you think about it, most fiction is a matter of life being a tricky business and surviving it, in various ways.

BETTY STARR: But she does it very decently, I mean there's never one point in her whole existence that she does something underhanded to survive.

STARR: Well, I think there are times where she would do something outside of her normal code of behavior that she really didn't ***want*** to do.

CF: Generally, but not to people who didn't deserve it (proven several times over).

STARR: Yes. But usually, that's left to Daddy or Punjab or the Asp. The really dirty work is left to the big guys. (laughs)

CF: We remember this very odd sequence where Annie had singlehandedly captured six hundred U-Boat sailors in World War Two... (Laughs) And, quite literally, she didn't know what to do with them! (Laughs) She had this castle full of captured U-Boat sailors!

BETTY STARR: "Sgt. York"!

STARR: Yes, I'll bet that sequence came out of "Sgt. York."

CF: Almost definitely! And she handed them over to Punjab who sent them off to the land of the Magi! (Laughs) He just got rid of 'em!

STARR: (Laughs) That was handy!

CF: It really was! Just like perfect clean-up crew.

BETTY STARR: I wish I had one around!

CF: Punjab is like the housekeeper's best friend, there, that's where all the dust was.

STARR: Well, he's really Mr. Clean.

CF: He looks just like that!

BETTY STARR: He does!

CF: I bet that's where they got the image! We were hearing all sorts of rumors when the ***ANNIE*** strip was first sprung out on people, "Good gosh, it's gonna be revived!" and all that. Some of the rumors were pretty weird, including that Annie was going to be moved forward in time and was going to be a twenty-two-year-old reporter for the ***WASHINGTON POST.***

STARR: (Laughs)

CF: When you were approached with the project, did they tell you...

STARR: Nothing. Don't forget that a syndicate has a large staff, but they can't edit every single feature that comes in. I guess they have maybe...thirty-forty features. To ride a tight rein on all of them would be a virtual impossibility, especially since their features are processed daily, not like putting our a book every few months. They pretty much have to leave it to the creator. They just wanted to see if I had any thoughts on it, and the thoughts that I presented to them were the ones they bought. I see Annie as about twelve. She's a bright twelve-year-old. And she's been around. For her to be a child after forty years, fifty years...

CF: Is a little strange.

STARR: Yes... so, she certainly has adult perceptions, and yet, she is still a child, she still yearns for companionship.

BETTY STARR: Looking for a mother...

STARR: I don't know about looking for a mother.

BETTY STARR: No, well, that was one of the things, she was looking for a parent. The original Annie. And now, she has her Daddy.

CF: Her surrogate money bag, whom she can turn to...

STARR: Well, Daddy Warbucks is a terrifically attractive character too. Without my realizing it, he's probably as virile a character as has ever been created in American fiction. I hadn't thought of him that way, and yet, working with him I have found that that's the only way to do him.

CF: Is he going to be back?

STARR: Oh, sure, sure.

CF: Last time, he was in the land of Magi.

STARR: He'll be back in the next sequence. (Appearing as this is printed.)

CF: Is the Asp returning?

STARR: Next sequence.

CF: So you're bringing back the classic set of characters.

STARR: I'll be going through it and seeing whichever ones can be revived. There was a character... I don't know how well he was re-

A SECRET MESSAGE! QUICK! SEND OUT AND OR SHE OPP AWN OUR SECRET!
VE GET HER EASY!
E-E-E!
3-9-43
VUFF!
VASS IST?
VESSIR, COLONEL, ANNIE IT WORKS JUST LIKE AN OLD-FASHIONED CAGE BUT TRAP!
UHHUH-THAT OLD SPANGLERD, WHO BUILT THIS CASTLE SURE HAD IDEAS! WELL, WE'LL KNOW WHERE THEY ARE FOR A SPELL.
NO WAY OUT O' THAT PIT! IT'S TWENTY FEET DEEP OK! BIG ENOUGH FOR LOTS MORE!
HM-M-M...TWO MORE...THAT MAKES FOUR...THAT WAS EASY--BUT THEY'RE GOIN' TO GET HARDER TO CATCH, FROM NOW ON.
MARIE ANNE

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-WELL, IF YOU DON'T LIKE A POLITICIAN, DON'T VOTE FOR HIM, MRS. SCRUBBS!
I NEVER VOTE FOR ANY POLITICIANS!
HAROLD GRAY 6-5
THAT SURE MUST LIMIT YOUR CHOICE!
OH, I ONCE VOTED FOR A GUY WHO WAS NEVER IN POLITICS - BUT THE SECOND HE GOT ELECTED - BINGO! - HE TURNED INTO A POLITICIAN!
WELL, NATURALLY! WHEN ELECTED TO POLITICAL OFFICE YOU'RE AUTOMATICALLY A POLITICIAN!
AHA! SEE - THAT'S HOW THEY GET YOU!
© 1988 HAROLD GRAY

"I THINK WHAT THE SYNDICATE'S POINT OF VIEW WAS THAT THEY WANTED A REACTIONARY PARANOID."

ceived, and that's a problem, 'cause Harold Gray did pretty much what he felt the public should have. Whether the public responded to it or not, I'm not sure. I know they liked the Asp, I know they liked Punjab. I feel pretty safe with them, but there's a character called Mr. Am, who apparently lived forever.

CF: Yes!

STARR: Do you like him?

CF: Yes!!!

STARR: Well, that's a vote of two so I'll consider it... I really don't know what the Hell he is... Some people think he's God.

CF: We don't think that Gray ever said what he was. It was very clear, though, that he was the original Santa Claus. That was the only identity that he ever admitted to.

STARR: Did he ever pull that in?

CF: Yeah, I even think we can find that daily for you.

STARR: Really?

CF: Yeah, he ran around in a sea-serpent submarine, that was supposedly the origin of all the sea-serpent myths. Fascinating character.

STARR: Yes, well, he was well done, then? The ***ANNIE*** as I'm doing it right now is so rooted in everyday life that to go to that mystical, I don't know... I didn't mind the magic cape, the land of Magi, found myself enjoying it actually, somehow that worked. The Mr. Am character is so far-fetched that I really don't know as I'm comfortable with it, but I may have to make myself comfortable with it, or find a way of making myself comfortable with it. The Santa Claus thing is so new to me. He's been around forever, since prehistoric times anyway, and the notion that he's God... you can see it will take a lot of thought...

CF: If he's been around for a long time, he's a good role model. What's more, he even liked Daddy Warbucks.

STARR: Yes.

CF: Actually, I think he was the only one Daddy Warbucks ever asked advice from, which must indicate something!

STARR: Well, if Mr. Am *is* God, who ***else*** would Daddy ask advice from? (Laughs)

CF: That was actually one of the questions we wanted to ask you. Gray invented hundreds of characters, he had these classic villains trouping through the sewers, and he had just ***tremendous*** numbers of supporting characters that Annie would hole up with for months at a time, then he'd reuse them. There was a farm family that Annie went back to once or twice, the Silos. I was wondering if you'd be drawing on any of those Gray characters.

STARR: It depends. One of the things I think Annie should certainly have at this point is some sort of contemporary reference to what is on most of our minds at any given time. The organized crime thing, I think, was fairly important. So was the political sequence preceeding it. I did a lot of research on those things, of which, I used maybe ten per cent. It's as though I have to know what I'm talking about in depth in order to tell that ten per cent. So, it's very time-consuming, but I do think it's important. The farm thing is kind of remote for me because I'm a city boy. And so, I would really have to find out what is going on. Grain is a big thing, should we feed Russia or not? Can we use it as a political weapon or not, and why can't we. There may be very good reasons why we can't.

BETTY STARR: Well, there's the moral point, are we taking food out of the mouths of starving people, do we use that as a political weapon?

STARR: Still and all, if the Russians are spending billions upon billions on armaments, there's no doubt in my mind that their intention is to outstrip us. Brezhnev made a speech recently at the Communist Party Congress in Czechoslovakia, that, without firing a single shot, just through misinformation, and subversion of various kinds, they'd dominate the world by 1985—and it looks as if he might do it! (Laughs) I don't see a single thing to indicate that it can't happen. I mention that kind of thing, in this KGB episode.

But, I really have to examine the farm situation, what to do with it. The history of farming, as I know it, is that it's a dreary life, not at all the bucolic picture that we imagine it to be. And I don't know if that kind of realism is commercial, or if anybody wants to hear it. I don't know. I approach a story from an adversary position. There's no dramatic tension in hammering away at one point of view. I like to know the opposing points of view on a subject before I can find my own path through it.

CF: Then, you're using Annie's adventures more to explore current events?

STARR: As best I can.

CF: Topics that need to be raised, or...

STARR: Things that are germane right now. For example, I'd love to do a story about why there is so much dough on top—there certainly seems to be—and why the middle is being decimated. If I could find the answer, and the research would be monumental, I certainly would do a story on it. And ***certainly,*** I would find an audience, because that's most of us. But I don't have the answer to it, and it's very hard to find the answer to it. Even people who are supposed to know about it have something like ten answers, and that's not good, because the continuity comic strip is a very primitive medium. We only have ninety words a day to advance the plot, recapitulate the previous day, and come to some sort of a punch line. It's very easy to be carried away with your research. These social issues are only

interesting to readers if they're affecting the lives of characters they care about. If the issue is too complex you muddy the narrative flow and the human element tends to get lost... which is a terrific way of losing readers.

CF: You have limits on the lengths of stories, too, don't you?

STARR: Pretty much, from nine to thirteen weeks, usually. With Gray, he would run stories, 56 weeks, 64...

CF: There was one that lasted almost two years.

STARR: That's a bad idea for today.

CF: Why do you think that change happened? It used to be you could do a story for a hundred weeks.

STARR: Well, I don't think anyone else could ever do a story for a hundred weeks. Gray did it because he was a maverick—you just couldn't tell him anything. He would just do whatever he was going to do, and the readers bought everything he did, so how could you tell him he couldn't do it?

CF: Also, he tended to put other stories inside a larger one, and he would stay in one location for two years and count that as a story, but there were different stories happening to the characters that she lived around. Like the time Annie was running away from Boris Sirob for about six years.

STARR: (Loughs)

CF: It's true! And she stopped off at three or four different places. She'd have little mini-adventures, but Sirob would always return, and and there'd be a three-week period where Sirob would be directly after her, and she'd hop over to another small town, or another medium-size city. And that kept up until Mr. Am turned Sirob and his cronies into monkeys. (Laughs)

STARR: (Laughs) Yeah, Well, that's very attractive stuff, and it's very tempting. It's fun to write, and fun to draw. And the only problem is straining credibility to that degree today. My guess is that it would go all right. And also, I have an "out," as it's Annie, and it's ***Gray***'s Annie, and it's my intention to be as faithful to Gray's Annie as I can be within my own limitations. So if I did use it, I have a precedent for it, and, I'll probably try it... I don't know that I'll be able to resist it, that's probably more to the point.

CF: It's a field you really haven't had much opportunity to explore since X. Boomer Bailey, and even that was very indirect fantasy elements.

STARR: I enjoyed Boomer. I enjoyed doing that.

CF: Did those stories get a good reaction?

STARR: Very good.

CF: You mentioned that he was based on ***THE GODFATHER*** to a point?

STARR: Yes, seeing ***THE GODFATHER***, and reading the book, it suddenly dawned on me that its popularity was probably due to the fact that everybody would like a Godfather like that. Someone you could call up and say, "Look, my neighbor is doing this..." (a la Brando). "Don't worry! I'll fix it all up!" (Laughs) Then you just hang up the phone and it's fixed!

CF: You don't have a neighbor anymore!

STARR: And the idea of a fairy godfather just evolved out of that. And it was enjoyable to do.

CF: Had you read the ***BARNABY*** strip?

STARR: I had read it from time to time, but I didn't get the paper it appeared in regularly.

CF: That had a fairy godfather in it, too...

STARR: I remember it...

CF: Except that he was an old fake.

STARR: (Laughs)

CF: Again about the Gray traditions: when you first started the ***ANNIE*** strip, you said that you were tracing Gray until it became too difficult for you to do so?

STARR: It wasn't a matter of it being too difficult, but I knew at the time I started tracing it, I couldn't do it forever. I did want to get the characters "into my hands." There's a tendency to go off in your own directions. I still check Gray's Annie from the thirties against my own, and the Sandys especially. The Daddys and Punjabs changed so much from sequence to sequence, so that I sort of stick with the Daddys and Punjabs that I have evolved from the various Daddys and Punjabs over the years. The early Daddys looked very Irish...

CF: They looked like Jiggs (of ***BRINGING UP FATHER***).

STARR: Yeah, yeah. And, subsequently, as his face got longer, and

"THESE SOCIAL ISSUES ARE ONLY INTERESTING TO READERS IF THEY'RE AFFECTING THE LIVES OF CHARACTERS THEY CARE ABOUT..."
MAYBE THE GOVERNMENT DIDN'T TAKE YOUR "LAZARUS PROCESS" BECAUSE IT'S TOO EXPENSIVE TO USE, "DADDY"...
HARDLY, IT'S A VERY CHEAP PROCESS...
~THE MAIN INGREDIENTS ARE SAND AND WATER... NO SHORTAGE OF EITHER ~AND ABSOLUTELY NON-POLLUTING!
ER-- COULD IT BE THAT YOUR PERCENTAGE OF THE TAKE IS TOO HIGH?
~DON'T SEE HOW ~I OFFERED IT TO THEM FREE!
THEN WHAT ARE THEY STALLIN' FOR?! THEY SURE CAN'T BUY THE PRICE ISN'T RIGHT!
ARF!
1-5-79

—WHEN BANGAVEL KICKED OFF, YOU WERE THE ONLY ONE WHO KNEW THE CODE!!
—SO WITHOUT KNOWING IT— I'VE BEEN THE KINGPIN— OR IS IT QUEENPIN— OF ORGANIZED CRIME?
KINGPIN— QUEENPIN— YOU WERE SO GOOD AT IT, YOU PRACTICALLY RUINED THE OTHER CRIME FAMILIES.
OH— WELL, I ALWAYS HAVE TENDED TO BE EFFICIENT—
YOU'RE NOT GRASPING THIS! THE MOB IS BIGGER THAN MANY COUNTRIES! YOU'RE PROBABLY THE MOST POWERFUL WOMAN ON EARTH!
WOW! AN' YOU WERE WORRIED ABOUT RE-ENTERING TH' JOB MARKET!
LEONARD GRAY 9-3

"I'D HOPE TO SIMPLIFY THE STYLE EVEN MORE... BUT I CERTAINLY WOULD NOT GO ANY FURTHER TOWARDS REALISM IN DRAWING..."

the situations he was in became a little more dramatic...

CF: Gray might have forgotten what he looked like, actually.

STARR: All cartoonists do. Check the early stuff of every cartoonist, watch the evolution of every character, and you'll see that they all change perceptably through the years. There's no avoiding it, and it's probably not desirable to maintain the first look, because of keeping up with the times. One thing that the comic strip has is that it's ***absolutely*** contemporaneous. Today is September 23rd, or whatever it is, they're reading it on September 23rd, and as far as the reader is concerned the action of the strip is happening on September 23rd. Probably the reason most costume strips have failed, is that they're too remote from one's everyday experience. At least, that's my feeling. Even westerns. Very few of them have survived for any length of time.

CF: Do you really think that that illusion is that the reader is sharing the adventure as far as the time frame is concerned?

STARR: Yup. It's happening ***today***, even though they're in the same room for two weeks or so in the continuity, still and all the illusion is that it's happening at the present.

CF: Would you say that that was your main reason for setting Annie in 1979, when it started, and not back during the war?

STARR: Oh, sure. Don't forget that Annie is now fifty-five years old. And all during Gray's time, she kept up with what was going on and remained whatever age she is, twelve or whatever. To go back to a particular time would be out of the question—never even considered it. The whole point was to maintain the character as Gray had done it.

CF: Regardless of the fact that the impetus for the revival came out of the period of the musical?

STARR: Oh, sure. The musical takes it from the 1920s. It takes a slice of Annie's adventures and presents its version of it in 2 hours, but when Gray died in the 1960s, Annie's adventures were contemporary with that period, and to take it back to an earlier period would create a kind of time warp. It would make me very uncomfortable.

CF: How far do you think the Starr style is going to get into ***ANNIE?***

STARR: No more than it is now. I would hope to do it simpler. Right now, the period of Gray's style that I'm following had a lot of pen rendering, and, with today's reproduction, the less of it you do, the better off you are. Yet Gray's stories were essentially dramatic. You're dealing with atmosphere, and storytelling, very much as you would in a straight strip. So I've had to do much more rendering than I think is wise for these times. I'd hope to simplify the style even more, and I will be trying to move in that direction, but I certainly would not go any further towards realism in drawing than I've done to this point. It occurred to me when I was going through Gray's stuff, that as he moved through the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, he was trying to go as straight as possible. A lot of his drawing in the 1950s was heavy with light and dark. It's as though he was influenced by Caniff in those years but it wasn't what he could do best. It seemed to me he was drawing as straight as he could, and as well as he could. And so, I thought drawing poorly in an attempt to emulate his style would be a disservice both to him and the memory of the strip. Those who remember Gray's Annie, remember an overall flavor, and if I copied his mistakes, which is the tendency when trying to be literally faithful to a style, I felt I would be unfaithful to the reader's memory of Annie. It wouldn't be doing Gray any favors, or the strip itself. So I do probably animate it much more than he did, but my feeling is, had he been alive, he would have moved in that direction. That's my ***hope***, at any rate. But the total attempt is to maintain the continuity, as Gray might have done it. I have no desire to turn it straight, go completely realistic.

CF: Every now and then, while reading Annie's off-the-cuff remarks, it's possible to get the feeling that Annie knows she's fifty-five years old.

STARR: (Laughs) I don't get that feeling at all. So far, I guess it's been out about a year now, and I have the absolute conviction that she's twelve. A sophisticated twelve.

CF: In one strip, I think it was reprinted in that newspaper article, in which Sheik Bahd-Simel hauls her out to wash dishes, and she says, "Well, I sure have been down this road before!" And the astute reader says, "Oh, right, the Depression!"

STARR: (Laughs) Well, not the Depression, particularly, but she ***has*** washed a lot of dishes in her time! And she has swept a lot of floors, and made a lot of beds, and the reference there was not so much a particular time-period, but to the kind of life she's lead up until that

©1981 Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate
...DO I SENSE THAT YOU'D LIKE MAY TO MARRY ME, ANNIE? I COULD SURE USE AN ALLY-
IF THE MOB'S STILL AFTER HER, I'M HOPIN' YOU CAN KEEP HER SAFE, MR. GARR.
WELL--SAFER, ANYWAY...
Y'MEAN YOU'RE NOT SURE?! ARE YOU TELLIN' ME ORGANIZED CRIME IS MORE POWERFUL THAN THE F.B.I.?!
IF MONEY IS POWER, YES! THEY TAKE IN ABOUT 56 BILLION A YEAR IN DRUGS ALONE! THAT BUYS A LOT OF RECEPTIVE EARS, AVERTED EYES AND CLOSED MOUTHS!
JOWDY GRAY 9-24

time.

CF: You've been describing to us that sometimes you get ideas from news or from kind of just picking up on a topic, that you think is important enough, or contemporary enough to merit discussion.

STARR: Sure, sure.

CF: And you described to us the tremendous amount of research you go through to make sure whatever position you're taking is probably the most reasonable, it seems.

STARR: Well, I don't try to be absolutely fair, I will sometimes go out of my own rancor. One of the stories coming up, after the sequence I'm working on now, will be about Medicare swindles. The medical profession has had the greatest rise in personal income of any group in the country, and at the same time, they're ripping off Medicare to the tune of... like half of the Medicare bills that are paid are fraudulent! Medicare is costing the taxpayer roughly twice what it should, and the doctors are getting even richer than they deserve to be. On the other hand, medical education costs a fortune, takes a long time, and so what if they're doing well? It's perfectly reasonable. Still, it's a cheat, and it's a deliberate cheat. They know exactly what they're doing. Doctor will examine a patient, and another doctor will come over with a clipboard and say, "Sign this." The patient signs it, and the doctor gets seventy bucks as a consultant. Do that four or five times a day, and you're doing all right.

CF: You don't need to work.

STARR: Whatever for?

CF: Wander around...

STARR: Meanwhile, we pay for it, and we're not even sick. (Laughs)

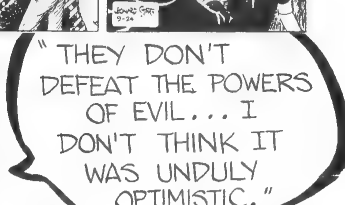
CF: But you also said that Annie's is a conservative viewpoint. Are you unofficially coloring your position and what you correspond...

STARR: Well, conservative in so far as she's self-sufficient, ethical, hard-working, non-complaining... Waiting for someone else to do something is not Annie's way. And she really doesn't have too much sympathy for anybody else who waits around for somebody else to do something.

Last sequence I had, I had this elderly character who lives in 1943 in his mind [Poppy Flowers] and Annie's reaction to that. Everyone else thinks that he's still infatuated with the excitement of the war period, while actually, he's harking back to the time when he was useful. And I have her a soliloquy, a device Gray was heavily into, wherein she says, if I remember correctly, "It look as though if you're determined to be useful, all you have to do is to decide not to be useless." And even in his mania, Poppy was collecting scrap and wastepaper and so on, but while thinking he was doing it for WWII, it was still practical.

CF: Now it's part of the conservation effort?

STARR: Pretty much. And so, she's conservative to that degree. Still, you know, there are people who should get welfare. There are people who shouldn't. There are some who are getting ten times what they should be getting in welfare. They get seven checks a week. And meanwhile, the government can't possibly... you know, the government's broke. How can we keep providing care for those who are deserving of it?



CF: The first story that you did, the one with Annie and Bahd-Simel, seemed to be really a Gray story: Warbucks with the solution to the world's ills, and the world is resisting that solution to the bitter end, and Annie is, of course, "Rah, rah, Daddy Warbucks!" And then, Daddy goes off to the Land of the Magi for a vacation, and Annie returns to the real world. And the real world is filled with these people like Senator Brassie, and May Flowers, who are fairly innocent to the workings of the world, and they get disillusioned, but through the process of disillusionment, they become stronger people, because they now know the forces of evil, and are ready to combat them. At least, they can recognize them.

STARR: That's pretty much Gray.

CF: Is that going to be a theme that you are going to be returning to? Over and over again?

STARR: That depends.

CF: It's a very optimistic theme, and it's not really removed from what was going on with ***ON STAGE***.

STARR: Well, it's not all that optimistic. Remember that Senator... what was his name?

CF: Lawfty?

STARR: No, Senator Brassie. Senator Brassie does not win.

CF: Neither does May Flowers. Big crime, organized crime, is still at it.

STARR: They don't defeat the powers of evil. The powers of evil are still out there: Senator Lawfty is undoubtably going to win the struggle, organized crime is still out there, just as powerful as ever, even becoming part of the alies program is no guarantee she's going to survive.

CF: Even Garr is not very sure that she's gonna survive.

STARR: Garr... The name Jed Garr [J. Edgar—Garr was an undercover FBI man] was a tip-off to the astute reader. No, I don't think it was unduly optimistic.

CF: And you don't think that Gray was particularly optimistic. There was still that threat of...

STARR: No, he thought that the world was out to get him. My reading of Gray is: you have to be on your toes!

STARR: Every story is an experiment. You never know what the reaction is going to be until you've done it. There's no such thing as a sure story. Some of the stories that I was most delighted with got virtually no reaction at all (this is for ***ON STAGE***) and others that I had very little faith in would get a terrific reaction. There's just no judging it. Something will just hit a common nerve somewhere and you'll get a response, and you never know where you'll trigger it. The public en masse is a very strange animal. All you can do is hope for the best. You really can't predict it. If I could predict it, I'd get out of this business and go into the business of predicting.

CF: Consulting.

STARR: Yes.

CF: One of the interesting things about the last three stories in ***ANNIE*** is that in the first one, Annie is very much the major character. Very much, "This is Little Orphan Annie, people. You haven't seen her for a few years, but ***here she is!***" And in the ***"Senator Brassie"*** story, she was there in practically every single daily and every single Sunday, and almost always had some sort of a speaking role. And then, in the ***"May Flowers"*** story, she was still there, but she was more along the lines of a supporting character.

STARR: I may have let that get away from me a little bit. I think I got infatuated with the idea of a secretary becoming the head of the Mafia...

CF: And not realizing until the end when the reports come in...

STARR: Well, the reason that I had the father-in-law in there was that he was Annie's responsibility. And so, she'd stay on the scene with that, and of course, she was the catalyst at the end with the air raid siren. She sort of saved the day, and you really can't stay with the main character all that much. You'll use her up. And to get variety of stories, you can't always have the threat to a main character. I think that you have to segue away, and re-establish it. In the next story, the focus is on her very specifically. Again, you just hope for the best. I did think the idea was strong, and I may have gotten carried away with it, but that will happen anyway, no matter how careful you are. Once you're into it, it has to take its own direction in order to fulfill the premise of the story. You just have to go with it.

CF: You said earlier that, at least in ***ON STAGE*** you would dream up plots, and the characters would seize control of the story and take it into other directions?

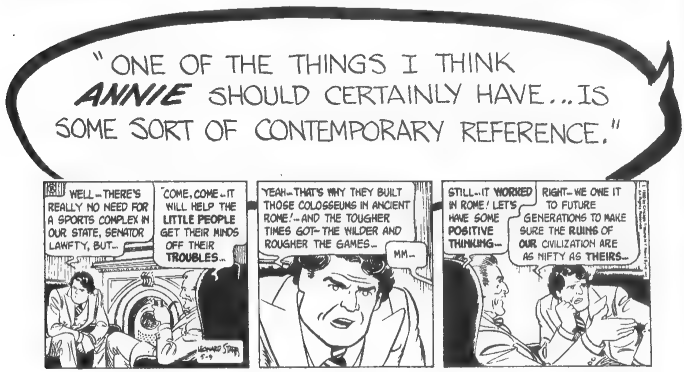
STARR: That happens with ***ANNIE***, too. It's possibly just my method of working. There may be writers who stick to their outlines very carefully. I used to write very very tight outlines, but I found that about halfway through the actual writing of the story I would disregard them, so I stopped doing careful outlines. I'd just have an idea for a story, and a punchline, so that I'd know where I was going. And even then, I would have to swerve away from my original ending from time to time. I think if you stick too closely to your outline, it comes out artificial, the characters don't get a chance to "breathe" on their own. It becomes too obviously crafted. The joints are too visible. Remember a writer named James Branch Cabell?

CF: Definitely.

STARR: Well, he had a very florid, very ornamental style. He composed all his books in his mind before he sat down to write, and then just copied them out of his head in longhand, a beautiful Spencerian script, and sent them off to the engravers. The proofs would come back, he'd correct them here and there, and that would be it! Well, I can't do that. (Laughs) There are various ways of working. Some guys have to work from a very tight outline, doing a movie or television script. I just sit down and write the meat of it without regard to length, or how sloppy it is, and then I sit down and cut and polish page by page as I go through it. Editing and polishing as you go along on your first draft is just backbreaking work, the end is never in sight, 'cause you're always on page ten of a hundred-and-fifty-page script. So you have to dope out the best methods for yourself.

CF: Two questions down the end, here. Who were your influences—both artistic and literary—and have they changed over the years?

STARR: Well, originally, it was Alex Raymond. When I was a kid, I was crazy about Flash Gordon. And then, ***TERRY AND THE PIRATES*** took over. I felt a real guilt at switching my loyalties, and I wouldn't admit it to myself for a long time (Laughs). I'm sure it was the story content, plus Caniff's dramatic sense, that pulled me toward that. And that was about it, because by that time, I was getting on and comic strips weren't really that interesting to me. Those were about the major influences. Raymond was a better draftsman. Caniff was a better dramatist. Probably I fall somewhere between, like some of Raymond's refinement, which showed itself in ***ON STAGE*** and the dramatic aspect of what I liked about Caniff—kind of a hybrid, I


"ONE OF THE THINGS I THINK ANNIE SHOULD CERTAINLY HAVE...IS SOME SORT OF CONTEMPORARY REFERENCE."
WELL—THERE'S REALLY NO NEED FOR A SPORTS COMPLEX IN OUR STATE, SENATOR LAWFTY, BUT...
COME, COME—IT WILL HELP THE LITTLE PEOPLE GET THEIR MINDS OFF THEIR TROUBLES...
HOWARD SHAW '79
YEAH—THAT'S WHY THEY BUILT THOSE COLOSSEUMS IN ANCIENT ROME!—AND THE TOUGHER TIMES GOT—THE WILDER AND ROUGHER THE GAMES...
MM—
STILL—IT WORKED IN ROME! LET'S HAVE SOME POSITIVE THINKING—
RIGHT—WE ONE IT TO FUTURE GENERATIONS TO MAKE SURE THE RUINS OF OUR CIVILIZATION ARE AS NIFTY AS THEIRS...

would think.

CF: Is there anybody working in comics now whose work you admire?

STARR: Oh yeah. I like, um, there are some really terrific profesionals: Johnny Prentice, Stan Drake, Alex Kotzky, Jack Murphy, just terrific artists; the Bigfoot guys, Dik Browne, Mort Walker. Occasionally, it's very hard to judge from one or two strips.

CF: ***ANNIE*** is rising just tremendously in popularity. You mentioned that a hundred papers isn't bad for the circulation of a continuity comic strip?

STARR: Not great, but not bad.

CF: And you're in close to four hundred, now? Rather an outrageous success as far...

STARR: It's, uh, I take nothing for granted, you know? At one time, a comic strip was sort of a life time annuity. Now, it's like television.

CF: A couple of seasons, and you're up for renewal?

STARR: Just about. So, as a consequence, I just do it, and do it the best I can.

CF: We would guess you've learned from ***ON STAGE*** that editors can drop strips for no reason at all.

STARR: You learn that very early. Consequently, I still keep other irons on the fire if only as a refresher. If you stay with one thing, it gets kind of stale. No avoiding it. Since it takes so long to do, your input is severely limited. So, one way of maintaining your interest is to vary your output, use other parts of your ability. And it does stimulate the other. They do interact, and it's good exercise—exercising both arms, really.

CF: Do you see the popularity of Annie as kind of a base you can experiment with, so you can experiment with the types of stories that you will be doing?

CF: You have any career goals at this point?

STARR: No, I never did. I just fell into virtually everything I've ever done. If it hadn't have been for that notice on the bulletin board at Pratt, I might have gone in an entirely different direction—I just did whatever there was to do at the time.

CF: You mentioned that you didn't think there was much future for the continuity strip?

STARR: I think there should be, but editors are certainly resisting them right now.

CF: Do you think it's the editorial resistance or the audience resistance?

STARR: No, no the polls show that they're fairly strong—at least the last ones that I saw. The ones that are still around are apparently holding their own, but you obsolutely could ***not*** sell a new one. The editors don't want to see new ones, they don't want to talk about 'em, they disregard them altogether. There's been terrific attrition in the ones that are still going, and I don't know why. Well, as long as I have been doing this, I've always felt that the editors resented comic strips ***per se***. I think they think the space should be used for news or advertising, whatever. And it's a shame, because cartoonists are very family-oriented, and there's nothing they wouldn't do to please a paper. All they would have to do is get a request for cooperation, a familial sort of atmosphere from the papers carrying their features, but it's never been forthcoming. It's not a pleasant way to work. It's dealing with people who don't really want you, even under the best of circumstances. Maybe the editors feel comics aren't really pulling their weight and resent paying for them. Still, comics have certainly maintained their grip for what, 70 years, 75 years? Still here. Still maintaining their hold somehow. ●

BRUSH STROKES

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1980 started off on a rather sour note for many comics fans. Not only did the new year bring the retirement of the much-respected creator of ***PRINCE VALIANT,*** Harold Foster (the strip continued under John Cullen Murphy), but Marvel and DC each raised the price of its comics line by a dime, going from 40¢ to 50¢. The price increase was in part tempered by the addition of new story material (eight new pages for DC and five for Marvel), but throughout the country the moans of fans were heard as they recalled those glorious days when comics were only a dime each. To further darken the horizons of collectors, Gold Key suspended its newsstand sale of comics due to the unprofitably high returns of their unsold comics, and went to a system of direct-sale bagged comics only. ***UNCLE SCROOGE*** comics, a favorite of both older and younger fans, disappeared from the shelves of comics shops. However, the gloom was dissipated in part by the end of February when two new publications, Marvel's ***EPIC ILLUSTRATED*** and New Media Publishing's ***COMICS FEATURE*** each made its debut.

By the Spring, most fans had gotten over the shock of the comics price increase and were optimistically predicting that 1980 would be a great year for both of the major companies—as well as for the increasingly-more-important alternative presses. ***CAPTAIN CANUCK,*** the Canadian-produced comic, arranged for nationwide distribution in the United States. Marvel announced that the reception of Moon Knight by readers and purchasers had been sufficiently enthusiastic to justify giving the character his own title. Two new magazines devoted to comic strip reprints, ***CHAPTERS,*** and later, ***THE COMIC STRIP NEWS,*** appeared. Much more importantly, Marvel Comics anounced that it intended to develop a whole line of publications, some one-shot albums, and other would-be regular magazines—all of which would cater specifically to the tastes of the burgeoning specialty ("fan") shop audience.

Summer came and proved to be extremely interesting months for most comics watchers. Not only was there a major ***contretemps*** over the ending of the controversial ***"Dark Phoenix"*** epic which ended with ***X-MEN*** writer Chris Claremont and artist John Byrne killing off Jean (Phoenix) Grey under direct orders from Marvel editor-in-chief Jim Shooter that they hew to the Comics Code. The character's demise in the 137th issue of the ***X-MEN*** title provided the major topic for discussion during the early Summer convention season. By the end of the Summer, though, there was something new to talk about: the defection to DC of two of Marvel's most prestigious creators. Roy Thomas, after fifteen years at Marvel and a former stint as that company's editor-in-chief, bolted to DC after negotiations with Marvel over his contract renewal broke down. DC, jubilant over their new catch, immediately assigned Thomas the revival of the Justice Society of America, and a new title featuring a sword-and-sorcery character created specifically for DC by Thomas. In addition to Thomas' move to DC, older DC fans were delighted by the news that Carmine Infantino planned a return to the company he had once served as penciller, inker, and publisher. In a decision made with no small amount of nostalgia, Infantino was first assigned ***THE FLASH,*** the comic with which he is most identified.

Unfortunately, the very end of the Summer saw the death of Dick Dillin, one of DC's most respected pencillers. His death at age 52 meant that the ***JUSTICE LEAGUE OF AMERICA*** comic was left without his services as regular penciller for the first time in over a hundred issues.

Autumn was a time of transition for many. John Byrne left the pencilling chores of the fan-favorite ***X-MEN*** title, citing his growing boredom with the series he had pencilled for over three years, as well as his wish to have more creative control over his assignments. Dave Cockrum, the artist who first visualized the New X-Men returned to the series. Over at DC, promotions were being handed out right and left: Paul Levitz left his editorial duties (one part of which was the organization of ***DETECTIVE #500,*** the anniversary issue of DC's oldest continuious title) to take up the responsibilities of being DC's Business Manager; Joe Orlando was moved up to Editorial Director; and Dick Giordano, one of the former stars of DC's editorial ranks, was once again appointed a full editor over many of DC's most prestigious titles (including the several Batman titles and Roy Thomas' new sword-and-sorcery series).

Late Autumn brought the release of Marvel's long-awaited ***DAZZLER*** comic. In an unexpected move, Marvel used the first issue of the new comic to test the strength of the comics specialty shop market. Over 400,000 copies of ***DAZZLER #1*** were available only through direct-sales markets. Even Marvel was surprised by the magnitude of the comics fan market.

The year drew to a close on a rather mixed note. New Media Publishing gave the comics fans a holiday gift by announcing that two new graphic magazine titles, ***ADVENTURE ILLUSTRATED*** and ***FANTASY ILLUSTRATED*** were being readied for release in the Spring of 1981. However, Marvel's cancellation of almost all of its black and white comics line cast a damper on most comics readers' spirits.

However, the events of the past year were not quite as important to comics fans as were the books themselves that were produced during that time. The events that transpired during the year have already faded into vague memory, but the great comic book successes or failures hold more lasting memories for their readers—and are still being talked about. ***COMICS FEATURE*** has gathered together some of our most astute reviewers and asked them to comment about the series that ***they*** thought were important standouts among the comics published during 1980.●

YEAR IN REVIEW

GREEN LANTERN

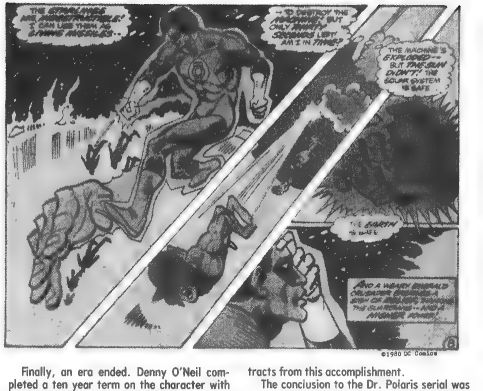
The Greening of a Crusader

by Frank McGinty

1980 was the year in which things finally began to fall into place at DC. After all those years when it seemed that the one-time leader in the field had forgotten how to produce something so basic as a super-hero comic, a number of factors combined to put some excitement back into DC books. Case in point: ***Green Lantern.***

Now, ***Green Lantern*** has, on more than one occasion, been among DC's notable books. In the past few years, however, the book seemed to wander off into a void of aimless plotting and conflicts lacking in any kind of suspense, other than that meager sort generated by the question "How long can they keep this up?" In 1979, by way of example, author Denny O'Neil brought forth such memorable menaces as Granny Bleach (complete with the usual complement of idiot offspring), Professor Ojo, Mrs. Vorpal the Chili Fiend, El Espectro, and the never-to-be-forgotten Crumbler. Whatever drama existed in these stories was smothered by art that achieved mediocrity—in good months. Even the book's solo saving grace, the deft character bits, seemed to disappear behind a screen of dull drawing.

Steps to correct this sorry state of affairs had already been taken by the beginning of 1980, as Green Arrow and Black Canary disappeared from the supporting cast. The year opened with the concluding installments of the "Power War" serial, pitting the renegade Green Lantern, Sinestro, and the Weaponers of Qward against the Guardians of Oa and their minions, the Green Lanterns.1 You'd figure that an interdimensional, interstellar war would liven things up. It didn't. O'Neil's interest seemed to follow Green Arrow out of the book. Each time our hero tried to nab Sinestro, somebody stumbled in his way to prevent the capture. Hal Jordan repeatedly made appearances lasting no more than a couple of panels before ducking out for some more ring-action (no wonder he can't hold a job). The fearsome Shark didn't even last a full issue. What was supposed to be a universe-shattering conclusion to the serial (**#127**, April) seemed curiously unspectacular, bogged down by flat, uninspired writing. Incredibly, the art (now by Staton and McLoughlin) deteriorated even further. Featureless backgrounds, stiff figures and horribly crude facial expressions brought this book to new lows.


THE ECOLOGIES ARE CONFLICTING, AS ARE THE LIVING ENERGIES OF THE 3 RINGS AROUND US...
...TO DESTROY THE ONLY THING IN THE UNIVERSE I'M SUPPOSED LEFT! AM I, I'M FINISHED!
THE MACHINE'S EXPLODED— BUT THE GEM DIDN'T! THE SOLAR SYSTEM IS SAFE!
AND A WEARY GUARDIAN OF SPACE RETURNS TO HIS WORLD, AND ON EARTH, HAL JORDAN RESUMES HIS DUAL LIFE—AND A MUNDANE ROUTINE...
©1980 DC Comics

Finally, an era ended. Denny O'Neil completed a ten year term on the character with **#129** (June), an afterthought of sorts to the Power War, in which the Qwardian general, his forces shattered, attempts revenge. "***The Attack of the Star Sapphire***" actually had everything the serial lacked: tight plotting, sharp, incisive dialogue and genuine suspense, demonstrating once again O'Neil's masterful economy of statement. One can't help regret that the writer couldn't find it in himself to maintain this level of achievement in previous issues.

A number of scripts, by various writers, followed; these were remarkable only for the control exercised by editor Jack Harris which maintained continuity of setting and character from issue to issue. Then Marv Wolfman took over the series—with a vengeance. In his first issue alone, Wolfman brought back Dr. Polaris and Bruce (Eclipso) Gordon, plunged Ferris Aircraft back into financial trouble, sicced a "mysterious" menace on the Ferris family, and renewed the romantic entanglement between Carol Ferris and Hal Jordan. At least no once can accuse Marv of stinting on plot development. In the follow-up, Wolfman abruptly shifted gears to present a remarkable sequence in which our hero, ringless, is left to fend for himself in the Arctic. For the first time, a complete issue of ***Green Lantern*** passed without the heretofore obligatory charging of the power ring. That the reader was left to resolve for himself such logical lapses as a man wrestling a polar bear and driving along a seaside highway while half-blind in no way detracts from this accomplishment.

The conclusion to the Dr. Polaris serial was one of those soporific scripts wherein the hero and his opponent snarl threats at one another for an uninterrupted seventeen pages. Fortunately the writer bounced back with a two-parter that packed the action in even tighter than before, as GL, summoned to the future by the Solar Council of the 58th century, makes an unscheduled stop along the way to encounter defunct DC hero Space Ranger. With both eras menaced by the Gordanians, that same race of cripple-kicking aliens running amok in ***TEEN TITANS***, the reader barely had time to catch his breath. And, just to keep the stew boiling, sidekick Thomas Kalmaku was put in danger by Eclipso just as the Lantern faded into the future. This latter scene is highly reminiscent of a famous one from John Broome's "***End of a Gladiator***" (***GL#46-47***); even though it doesn't come off quite as well as it did the first time around (age will do that to a plot device), it's still effective in pushing the suspense up a notch.

At the same time that this explosion in story direction was taking place, the art underwent a vast improvement. The same Joe Staton whose breakdowns were causing same among readers of ***GL, DC COMICS PRESENTS*** and ***LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES*** decided to concentrate on pencilling and inking ***GREEN LANTERN.*** Staton's drawing has improved considerably in the past few years, but this fact was often disguised by loose layouts and bad inking. It's now apparent that his formerly crude cartooning has become far more precise and engaging. He is not as adept at portraying fear and rage as is his onetime mentor, Gil Kane, but enjoys more success in conveying subtler things: a smile, a wry grin, an indignant frown. Admittedly, such talents are put to

1The Guardians, for the uninitiated, are the organizers of the Green Lantern Corps, a sort of space opera cross between the Vatican and the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

better use on something like Plastic Man than on Wolfman's "hyper" scripts, but Staton is also beginning to demonstrate some mastery of anatomy (for the first time in years, Hal Jordan is given convincing mass). On the whole, this art is preferable by far to the stale product of constipated imaginations on view in so many comics.

Does all this improvement mean that ***GREEN LANTERN*** is now that rarity, a good comic book? Well, let's not go overboard. Wolfman has had too many burners going at once ever since he took over the series, and has been rather careless in reintroducing many of the characters which O'Neil ignored. More to the point, Marv doesn't reintroduce them; he just drops the reader in the middle of the action and carries on from there. In the case of characters like Dr. Polaris, Iona Vane or Carl Ferris (whose last significant appearance was in ***GL#22***—seventeen years ago!), this is bound to cause confusion. Compounding this problem is Marv's status as a graduate of the Conway-Wein School of Famous Overwriters: he has never learned to excise excessive panel or wordage. As a result, the pages often seem crowded, characterization (such as it is) has to be slipped in between the punches; and, due to the pretty continuous activity, there seems little dramatic difference between major and minor scenes. These, combined with Wolfman's relentlessly humorless approach and pulp dialogue, make for a book that has on occasion caused this reader to reach for the aspirin.

Even so, credit is due all around for the changes which, if nothing else, have injected a plentiful amount of superheroic excitement back into ***GREEN LANTERN.*** If Wolfman can only lighten up on his scripts, and if Staton shows anywhere near the development in 1981 that he did last year, then the prognosis for this series must be promising. ●

YEAR IN REVIEW

THOR

by Chuck Huber

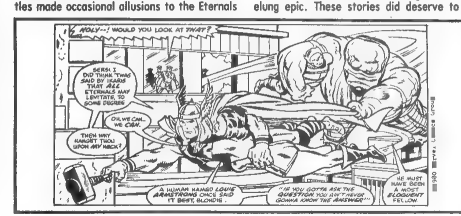
Ever since ***FANTASTIC FOUR*** #100, the folks at Marvel have tried to make their "anniversary" issues something of special significance. In the past year or so, this has been extended to making them double-sized as well, and commemorating milestones other other than hundredth issues. In a year in which so many titles have had "special" issues, the most ambitious, if not the most successful, would have to be ***THOR #300.***

Even though the ***"Celestials Saga,"*** as it is commonly referred to, began before 1980, the whole series deserves to be treated as one of this year's landmarks, since the bulk of the most significant events occurred in 1980. Its roots are in 1978, in ***THOR ANNUAL #7,*** when Roy Thomas interrupted his version of Ragnarok to tell of Thor's first encounter with the Eternals. By the end of the saga, it had become entangled with virtually the entire continuity of both ***THOR*** and ***THE ETERNALS,*** as well as dragging in the Wagnerian Ring cycle (or the Marvel Comics version thereof). When the smoke cleared, in ***THOR #301,*** a new team of authors had set themselves up with a practically clean slate on which to start a new saga of the God of Thunder.

Such an ambitious project had many levels on which it could succeed or fail. In the first place, it grew from Roy Thomas' desire to firmly incorporate Jack Kirby's Eternals, and their accompanying mythos, into the Marvel Universe. To a certain extent, there had already been interaction between the two. In the original strip, Kirby had incorporated references to S.H.I.E.L.D., the Thing, and the Hulk, albeit under duress, and then, it was never really clear whether the Marvel superheroes were more than comic-book characters in the world of the Eternals. Other Marvel titles made occasional allusions to the Eternals mythos, as with a passing reference to the Celestials in ***X-MEN #105.*** Still, until Roy acted, it would have been entirely possible to treat the Eternals as living on a parallel world to Marvel-Earth. But Roy Thomas believed that it was both necessary and inevitable to make the connection solid, and that ***THOR*** was the best place to do so. The validity of this judgment is a matter of opinion. Personally, I definitely do not feel that every story published by Marvel need take place on Marvel-Earth. In the case of the Eternals specifically, I would have been equally happy to let them stay apart from the Marvel Universe. Still, the basic task of incorporating the Eternals, as handled from ***THOR ANNUAL #7,*** through ***THOR #287,*** was done smoothly and reasonably. Why hadn't the Eternals been noticed before? Well, they chose to remain inconspicuous. As the Thunder God observed in ***#287,*** the Inhumans had also escaped observation for centuries, so why not the Eternals? (Of course this begs the question of why the less-pacifist Deviants were unknown, but perhaps their defeat by the Second Host of the Celestials forced them to hide themselves for a few millenia from humankind. Still, Roy did not make that point clear.) On that limited score, Roy succeeded pretty well.

After issue #287, however, a number of the flaws in the story began to show up. The first of these is the gradual shift in focues of the story from the Eternals' interaction with Thor, to the interplay between Thor and Odin. Now, after all, the title of the book is ***THOR,*** so putting the emphasis on the Thunder God rather than his guest stars is justifiable. Yet, in ***THOR #300,*** the saga of the Celestials on Earth, the very centerpiece of the Eternals own strip, is wrapped up—but the Eternals themselves play only a peripheral role! The tale as written was indeed a grand epic, but it seems only just that the Eternals play the central role intended for them by Jack Kirby.

One reason, I suspect, why they did ***not*** do so, is another and far more crucial flaw in the tale: Despite the fact that the story stretched over a year and a half worth of monthly issues, it was TOO CROWDED. In addition to the Eternals/Celestials storyline, Roy (abetted by Mark Gruenwald and Ralph Macchio) threw in the "true origin" of Odin and the Asgardians, and the Marvel version of the Ring of the Nibelung epic. These stories did deserve to be


ARGH!—I WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT?
SERIES 1 DID THINK "THOR" BASED BY JACK KIRBY'S ETERNALS MAY LIMITED TO SOME DEGREE
OH, WE CAN. WE CAN!
THEN WHY CANNOT THOU GAZE UPON MY NECK?
A HUMAN HAND LOUIE ARMSTRONG ONCE HAD IT BEAT, BLONDIE.
"IF YOU GOTTA ASK THE QUESTION YOU AIN'T GONNA KNOW THE ANSWER"...
HE MUST HAVE BEEN A HONEST FELLOW
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told at some point, and they were tied in somewhat with the Celestials storyline. But if one looks closely at how the "origin," the Ring and the Celestials interacted, it is clear that they were *not* necessary to be told together. Why then, did Roy do it this way?

I believe there are two reasons for it, though this is pure speculation on my part. The first of these is that Roy was gearing up all along to do the grand conclusion to the saga in ***THOR* #300**. Trying to do this led to problems in pacing. I suspect that the "El Toro Rojo" story in **#290**, a rather pointless tale, appeared due to a feeling that the story was moving too swiftly to its conclusion, as to the need to provide a fill-in breather for Keith Pollard. (Though I admit that I was moved by the touched-upon tragedy of the Eternal, Vampiro, with a mortal wife... and how it must have roused thoughts of Jane Foster in Don Blake.) On the other hand, when it became apparent that Roy was leaving ***THOR*** altogether by **#300**, he decided to try to fit in *all* of the storylines he'd been itching to do in the book before he left. That brings us to my second suspected reason for the crowding: the fact that Roy's long-ballyhooed Thor quarterly (a la ***KING CONAN***) was never scheduled. I suspect, though cannot prove, that the "Marvel version" of the Ring Cycle was originally hoped to accupy four issues of a quarterly Thor title, paralleling the four operas of the Wagnerian Cycle. When the quarterly title failed to materialize, I believe that Roy decided to try to wedge the story into the regular ***THOR*** title, despite the disruption to the Celestials storyline. Similarly, the "origin of Odin" story could have been done easily as an epic first issue of the quarterly title, if it really needed to be done. Consider what might have been done if the two issues of "origin" and the five issues (plus a bit of **#300**) of Ring Cycle had been covered in a separate title, unconnected to the Celestials storyline. Much more could have been done with the Eternals themselves and at a much more measured pace. I believe the "origin" and "Ring" subplots would have also benefitted from a more leisurely treatment.

Another cause contributed to overcrowding and displacement, and added a few flaws of its own: the "too many cooks" problem. The whole storyline has scars here and there from the differing aims of Roy Thomas on the one hand, and the Gruenwald/Macchio team on the other. All three had some desire to tie up bits of continuity, but the difference between previous Thor mythos, Roy's contributions, and the imperious demands of Omniversal Theory produced as many continuity glitches as it solved. Consider how inexplicable the behavior of Zeus (if not Odin) in attacking the Eternals in **#291-292** becomes in the light of his actions as revealed in **#300-301**. In the first stories, Zeus is a dupe of Odin, unconcerned about humanity, unfamiliar with the Eternals, and seemingly peripheral to the whole affair. But in the latter issues, Zeus is revealed to have been aware of the Celestials for a thousand years and intimately involved in the "pact of the gods." Huh?? For that matter, the only reason Odin can have for attacking the Eternals the way he did, rather than simply explaining the truth to Thor and Zuras, is the classic Odin-Stupidity which he

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displayed through most of the ***THOR*** series. For that matter, why didn't Ajak (who was there!) tell Thor or Zuras about the "pact of the gods"??? All in all, the crosspurposes of the different writers, and the sheer complexity of the plot they built up, caused even such masters of continuity hacking as Gruenwald and Macchio to stumble more than once.

Many would consider the sheer amount of continuity detail in these issues to be a failure. Personally, I enjoyed a lot of it, but that was only possible because I've read the entire run of ***THOR*** and have a good memory. Even without such botches as those mentioned above, and the additional confusion added to the mythology of Marvel by throwing in all the pantheons, one wonders whether the casual reader of the book wasn't bored senseless by

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it all. The Ring Cycle in particular was done in such sketchy fashion that its inherent drama was mitigated and the long parade of new characters all became muddled together. The continuity detail might have been handled more smoothly, but the general overcrowding of the story again precluded it.

Despite all the above negativism, there was one definite good achieved by the "everything and the kitchen sink" approach, in my opinion. The tying together of so many bits of business enabled Gruenwald and Macchio to give ***THOR*** a clean new start, purged of many of the crutches which have been done to death over the years, especially the Destroyer and Odinsword. These troublesome artifacts were at last given solid reasons for having existed, and then were disposed of in final (and meaningful) fashion. For too long, a few basic plots have been tiresomely repeated in this title. The new writing team promises to avoid all these hoary standbys. So far, with only the ludicrous ***"Locus"*** and the Moench fill-in to go by, it is too early to say whether they will live up to the promise.

I've heaped a lot of criticism on the Celestials Saga and the able mortals who wrote it. I suppose it's because there are glimmers throughout it of how much better it could have been—if a Thor quarterly had absorbed the "origin" and Ring Cycle and given them *and* the Eternals the room they deserved, if there had been a more unified vision of the plot from the beginning. ***THOR* #300** was a touch of real Northern epic quality: the Thunder God fighting with all his power against utterly hopeless odds to avenge Asgard and defend Earth... that is Thor as he ought to be. The Earth Goddess and Odin were well characterized as well. But as Linus Van Pelt sagely commented, "There's no heavier burden than a great potential." The Celestials Saga in ***THOR*** dared much, but only succeeded a little. ●

ZURAS! I SAY THEE NAY!
YOU DESPOIAH BROTHERS!! STEP HIM, BEFORE HE AROUSES ZURAS WRATH!
WHAT? THOU WOULDST SEND MERE MAIDENS AGAINST ME?
TRULY, THIS BE THE MOST BASE INSULT OF ALL.

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YEAR IN REVIEW

THE FLASH

by Kurt Olsson

The year 1980 was a busy one even for a super-speedster like the Flash as he, among other things, tracked down his wife's murderer, moved into a "singles" apartment complex, and became interested in a mystery woman named Fiona Webb. But the biggest change in the Flash's life this past year did not take place in any story—rather it occurred behind the scenes as Len Wein took over ***THE FLASH***'s editorial helm from Ross Andru.

When Andru took over ***THE FLASH***, he instituted an approach used quite often at Marvel. While DC, with its older school of editors (such as Boltinoff and Schwartz), had over the years put most of the emphasis on story structure and very little emphasis on realistic characterization (the term realistic is of course used very loosely here—one must keep in mind that this is comics). Marvel, after Stan Lee's success in the early 1960s, had placed a great deal more emphasis on such characterization. The problem is, though, that this attempt at realistic characterization has been stereotyped by some people to fit a formula. So because of Spider-Man's incredible record of success over the years, often-times what one sees substituting for realistic characterization is "Peter Parker Characterization": that being the burdening of a character with many problems to make his or her characterization seem more "realistic." This was the type of characterization which Andru brought with him to ***THE FLASH***. For a while, this approach worked, because stories tended to arise from the characters rather than the circumstances—a difference which separates human drama from melodrama. Barry Allen's personality was delved into deeper than it ever had been before as Andru had him react to marital problems with Iris Allen (his wife), and, because of Barry's being implicated in a heroin scam, interact more with his co-workers at the police station. Then Iris was murdered, and gone—at least for Andru's tenure—were the tight plots and well-thought-out gimmicks of the past. The Flash's character was also totally warped as he became a manhunter and spent issue after issue, month after month, searching for his wife's murderer in a multi-issue epic which looked as if it would never end.

It did end, though, but by that time Andru had left the book, and Len Wein had taken over. With his first issue of ***THE FLASH (#284)***, Wein ended the Iris storyline by having The Flash defeat the Lord of Limbo, and then relive his whole life in a race with time. At the end of the race, the Andru Flash was finally supplanted by the Wein Flash as Barry Allen planted flowers on Iris's grave and also put to rest the oath of vengeance he had sworn before her grave in ***THE FLASH #281***. With this occurrence, The Flash was no longer the vindictive hero (a la The Batman) of the Andru issues, but Wein and Bates also made it clear that The Flash was no longer the naive hero of the Schwartz years, either.

In his second issue as editor, Wein set the

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tone for his editorship. Instead of totally reverting ***THE FLASH*** back to the days before Andru and forgetting about realistic characterization, Wein introduced Barry Allen to a new boss, a new place to live, and a new set of neighbors. Against this all-new setting, Bates and Wein also brought back an old member of The Flash's "Rogues Gallery" and also brought back something not seen during Andru's tenure—the self-contained one-issue story. While Andru had been editor, issue-to-issue continuity had been very strong because the storyline had resembled a paragraph-long run-on sentence, but this had robbed the title of one of scripter Bates' greatest strengths: strong, tight plotting. Since ***THE FLASH #285***, continuity of that sort has been sacrificed by Wein—for instance, the reader learned in #285 that it had been a year since Iris had been murdered—but Bates' strong plotting sense has been brought back to the forefront. Two-part or three-part stories which quickly tie up loose plot threads have become the norm under Wein's leadership. Gone are Andru's long-winded multi-parters.

Barry Allen's character also became less extreme with Wein's arrival, because, as mentioned earlier, he gave up the role of vindictive hero and returned to being the easy-going, oftentimes late character as which he had been almost exclusively portrayed during the 1960s and most of the 1970s. In addition, when Wein took over, Barry stopped wallowing in his own self-pity, and he made an effort to leave the past by, among other things, moving into a "singles" apartment. Moving into a "singles" apartment also made it simpler for Barry to find another love interest, and he found it in Fiona Webb, the mysterious next-door neighbor introduced in ***THE FLASH #285***. After several issues in which the mystery surrounding Fiona's actions increased, Bates disclosed the reason for her actions and smoothly paved the way for a relationship between Fiona and Barry. This relationship has been handled with restraint by Bates, and this treatment has given it the maturity which one would expect from a Barry Allen.

This depth of characterization has not solely been focussed on Barry and Fiona, though. Since their introduction in ***THE FLASH #285***, Captain Frye, Mack Nathon, and Nathan's son Troy, have appeared regularly. This has not only added variety to the supporting cast, but has also given the reader even deeper glimpses into Barry's character than before.

By attempting to bring realistic characterization to ***THE FLASH*** without sacrificing the strong plotting sense which is Cary Bates' greatest virtue as a writer, Len Wein has helped mold ***THE FLASH*** into a much more solid book than it was during Andru's tenure. So, although The Flash did have a busy year, the biggest and best change he underwent in 1980 was a change in editors.●

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YEAR IN REVIEW

IRON MAN

by Rich Morrissey

Let's get one thing straight. I don't know all that much about Iron Man, having read his magazine regularly for only a little more than a year. I did know the basic setup, though, from following the Avengers and experimenting with his book in the past—and it's quite an interesting one: the super-hero who's also the salaried bodyguard to sickly millionaire Tony Stark, but unknown to the world is actually Stark himself. But the stories I read were boring, mired in that almost inescapable Marvel continuity that required a decade of background just to understand the plot—and the art was provided by the lesser talents in the office like George Tuska and Herb Trimpe. There was none of the grandeur or originality that made Marvel's front line great—so I decided relatively soon that this was one title that wasn't worth my money.

Last year, other fans whose opinion I respected started telling me how great ***IRON MAN*** had become—and, one day when I was in my local comic shop, the now-famous "***Demon in a Bottle***" cover caught my eye. I figured I might as well give it another shot, so I bought that issue and several preceding ones. But, things being what they were, it wasn't until I was stuck in a hotel room in Greece and getting tired of my other reading matter that I actually decided to take the plunge—and I was amazed! The character was actually ***interesting***, the art was worth more than just something to suffer through in order to understand the story, and Iron Man was fighting ***different*** kinds of villains—even himself, in a truly believable bout with alcoholism. But, different and noteworthy as that particular story was, that wasn't what most struck me—in fact, it was the first treatment of alcoholism in a comic book only because ***FIRESTORM***, in which Gerry Conway was obviously leading up to a similar crisis with Dr. Martin Stein, had temporarily died in the DC Implosion. No, it was simply the way so many diverse elements blended together to ***fulfill*** the potential that had been dormant for so long that many people, including myself, had considered it exhausted long before.

As a fan who's always preferred DC to Marvel, I'm tempted to argue—in reverse from what some Marvel fans have with some justice said about popular DC titles like ***THE NEW TEEN TITANS***—that ***IRON MAN*** is now almost a DC comic with a Marvel label. There's some justification for that, as writer David Michelinie, inker Bob Layton, and even editor-in-chief Jim Shooter are all relatively recent acquisitions of Marvel from DC. Indeed, Michelinie has stated that he was never a follower of much of the Marvel line, and was unfamiliar with the character when he was offered him. He accepted the assignment only when Bob Layton, who did know the character, offered to work with him and make sure none of Michelinie's stories violated the established continuity. And so he did, and still does (Layton is credited as a co-plotter, and is clearly the main source of the artistic style of ***IRON MAN***). The pencillers have been for the most part here today, gone tomorrow with John Romita, Jr. being the only one who stayed long enough to stick in my mind—but the art looked very much the same. Even so, both Layton and the pencillers obviously like to experiment, and have tried different layouts and styles, resulting in a unique style as identifiable with Iron Man as Marshall Rogers and Terry Austin's unique collaboration was identifiable with Batman.

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The story continuity, too, is less rigid than the one-issue-right-after-another scheme long followed by most Marvel titles, with days and even weeks often passing between ***IRON MAN*** issues. This is a definite across-the-board change that Jim Shooter has urged for the entire line.

But to give credit only to the DC influence in ***IRON MAN*** is to be unfair to Marvel's strong points—many of which are also prominent in the book. During his years at DC, Michelinie did do many memorable stories—but mostly for very serious and downbeat series like ***SWAMP THING*** and ***THE UNKNOWN SOLDIER***. When he attempted a super-hero title like ***AQUAMAN***, he tended to make that title's hero serious and downbeat, too (usually not very successfully, as when he killed Aquaman's baby son for no purpose except shock value). Probably his greatest failure at DC was ***STAR HUNTERS***, a science fiction series he had intended to treat in a serious and thought-provoking manner, but which his editor insisted be handled more lightly. As a result, it was neither good light adventure nor good drama, and died after a few issues. Michelinie's future plans, had he stayed at DC, were to combine several of his strips into a ***gestalt*** like Michael Moorcock's "***Eternal Champion***"—definitely ***not*** light reading.

But on ***IRON MAN***, with the help and encouragement of Layton and Shooter, Michelinie had finally succeeded in doing an interesting super-hero with a light touch—having ***fun*** with his characters, which was what Stan Lee first started out to do when he (with Kirby and Ditko) introduced the current generation of heroes at Marvel. For the first time, Tony Stark is really acting like a playboy, dressing in the latest styles and enjoying his life to the fullest. Combining that with the well-developed supporting characters (Bethany Cabe, Rhodey, Ling MacPherson, and even comic relief characters like Mrs. Arbogast) and the neat, original stories and art, it's no wonder that ***IRON MAN***, like the best titles coming out today from both companies, combines the best elements of both Marvel and DC with a result that, in some ways, exceeds the best "classic" work of any company. ●

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BUT FORTUNATELY, OUR GOLDEN AVENGER HAS ANOTHER TRICK UP HIS SLEEVE THAT PROVES TO BE JUST THE THING NEEDED!
GASP!!
WHOA!
'IRON MAN'! ARE YOU ALL RIGHT!

YEAR IN REVIEW

THE NEW X-MEN

by Kurt Busiek

One of the major problems with Marvel's continued story-epic tradition is that it has become so firmly entrenched as *the* way to write comics that Marvel writers tend to start out their extended storylines indiscriminately —often with no idea of how they are going to end up. A good example of this technique is the ***"Phoenix Saga"*** ***(X-MEN #101-138).*** This conglomeration of plot threads grew so ponderous and uncontrollable over its four-year span that it resulted (to everyone's surprise) in the death of one of the Marvel Universe's most established characters. Although this review of the end of the ***"Phoenix Saga"*** is primarily concerned with its culmination in 1980, the very nature of the storyline demands an analysis of the story's development over several years.

When the ***"Phoenix Saga"*** began, it wasn't even conceived of as an extended epic. The birth of Phoenix was merely a way to introduce a new member into the New X-Men. Jean (Marvel Girl) Grey, an old X-Man whom Chris Claremont felt did not fit into the new team, nevertheless still had strong ties to the team and its leader (Cyclops) which had to be resolved somehow. Breaking up the Scott-Jean romance would not do, so Jean was going to have to be present in the series, as a member or not. Her death and resurrection (in #101) was conceived as a means of "jazzing up" Jean, increasing her power level, and, by virtue of her dramatic metamorphosis, leave Claremont open to design a new personality for her (as he did not care for the old "young Republican" Jean). It can be noted that this process amounts to the introduction of a completely new character, retaining only the name Jean Grey and the romantic relationship with Scott Summers—provided that the romance survived the transition.

It's questionable whether this power boost was necessary. At the time of ***X-MEN #100,*** Jean had demonstrated an astonishing proficiency with her telekinetic powers. She had shown herself able to life three grown men, plus herself, and transport them through the air for several miles, with no apparent strain ***(CAPTAIN AMERICA #172).*** This was at least a six-hundred-pound telekinetic capacity, and nothing to sneeze at. Were she to have battled the New X-Men, none but Storm and Banshee could have withstood her, and possibly not even them. In the New X-Men, as in the old, Marvel Girl would have been one of the most powerful members.

Nevertheless, Claremont had determined to make Jean a "female analogue to Thor, Firelord, and The Silver Surfer," and as of Phoenix's first action appearance in #105, he did just that. Considering that she did much better against Firelord than Thor ever did, she was possibly even more powerful than Marvel's male "cosmic" heroes. Now Thor, Firelord, and The Silver Surfer are not notorious for working well in super-hero teams—in fact, they tend to be something of a writing handicap. Steve Englehart's last few issues of ***THE AVENGERS*** dramatically showed that Thor, when written correctly, is too powerful a character to work well with even the more powerful Avengers, to say nothing of the lower echelon. Any foe that Captain America or Iron Man could reasonably face was nothing compared to Thor. Claremont did not see this as a problem, stating that effective villains for The Silver Surfer had been invented regularly. But if the New X-Men were to go up against someone like Mephisto or the Ghost every issue, Wolverine and Nightcrawler would be left completely out of any battle, while Cyclops, Storm, Banshee, and Colossus would only be able to make ineffective jabs at their opponent, leaving everything ultimately up to Phoenix. She simply ***didn't fit into the team.***

Aside from her power level, she didn't particularly fit into the team anyway. Her telekinetic power, which had formerly been expressed through picking up objects and hurling them, shifting things around, keeping attackers at a distance, and so on, was tactically different. As Phoenix, colorful blasts came out of her hands and forehead, hurling villains through walls or breaking things. Since Cyclops, the team's leader, also hurled villains through walls and broke things, Phoenix was somewhat redundant. Worse still, she did it better than he did, thus rendering him ineffective. Her new personality was characterized by a "battle-lust" that overcome her when she was using her powers, making her a savage fighter, glorifying in violence. This trait, though unusual, was already present in the New X-Men, through the presence of Wolverine (who at least at

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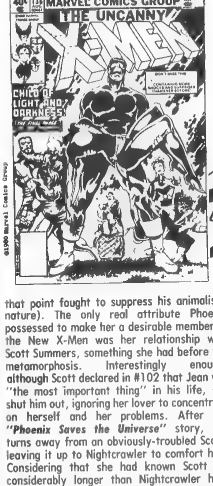


that point fought to suppress his animalistic nature). The only real attribute Phoenix possessed to make her a desirable member of the New X-Men was her relationship with Scott Summers, something she had before the metamorphosis. Interestingly enough, although Scott declared in #102 that Jean was "the most important thing" in his life, she shut him out, ignoring her lover to concentrate on herself and her problems. After the ***"Phoenix Saves the Universe"*** story, she turns away from an obviously-troubled Scott, leaving it up to Nightcrawler to comfort him. Considering that she had known Scott for considerably longer than Nightcrawler had, and was the closest person to him for most of that time, she should have realized what Scott was going through. Even after #109, they do not take the time to explore and redefine their relationship.

Her participation in the universe-saving story bears examination. She did save the universe, and did provide the New X-Men with their means of getting to where the action was—but that's about all she did. For all Claremont's protestations that capable villains could be come up with for her and the team, she had to be written out of what would have been her second and third battles. Phoenix against the Imperial Guard wouldn't have been much of a fight, so she was made incapable of fighting them, exhausted after the ordeal of powering up a space-warp machine. This would be reasonable, if not for the fact that it was her first chance to work with the team, and the writer copped out. When the New X-Men went up against the guardians of the crystal, she complained that she was still exhausted (even though it had been some time since the warp-energizing), and was merely able to drop a meteorite on Johf (the most impressive stunt in the battle; even exhausted, she outclassed the team). Nevertheless, rather than let her wipe out the menace in two panels, she was written out. Once inside the M'Kraan crystal, there was no mention of her fatigue. After all, it was her turn to shine.

Back on Earth, it seems, the creative team realized that there was ***something wrong with Phoenix,*** but they didn't know what to do to correct it. Since the aspects of the character that were causing the problems (the new personality, the cosmic power) were the ones which made her desirable (to them), rather than change their character, they simply let her flounder. Since the menaces which the New X-Men were facing could easily have been squashed by Phoenix, Claremont waffled between simple tactical underuse of his new "cosmic" heroine (#111, #113) and "mysterious power shortages" (#110, #112), until he finally blew up a volcano to get her out of the team until he could figure out what to do with her. The New X-Men, conveniently enough, complied with this new plotline, refusing to contact either The Avengers or Jean's parents, or even mention to Colleen Wing that her partner's roommate and would-be boyfriend's lover is dead. (Another problem worth noting is why there was no burning desire, on anyone's part, to "get" Magneto for the supposed double/quintuple X-murders.) But, back with Jean, we found that the only reason she had to be kept in the team in the first place (her previously-convincing love relationship with Scott Summers was vanishing swiftly. Upon her arrival at Edinburgh (and her stay at Muir Island), there was no commiseration between close friends who have lost their lovers, brothers, teammates, or what-have-you. There is no mention whatever of their tragic loss(es). They just don't care. Luckily, at the same time in the Savage Land, Scott Summers was discovering that he didn't care either, thus simply nulling one of the oldest relationships in the Marvel Universe. Scott finds solace in the arms of Colleen Wing, and Jean meets Jason Wyngarde. It was at that point that the series of events changed from simply a poorly-conceived character's problems fitting into a team, into the storyline that eventually resulted in Jean's death.

You see, Jason Wyngarde ("The name is as false as the man himself" (#125) or "His real name, ironically enough" (#138)—take your pick) turned out to be Mastermind, a charter member of the Brotherhood of Evil Mutants, and he had plans for Jean. Those plans required a somewhat different interpretation of the Phoenix concept than we'd gotten up to that point, so Claremont changed the character to fit the villain. Rather than having been a simple increase in power, the change from Marvel Girl to Phoenix by then involved freeing Jean's ultimate telepathic/telekinetic capacity. Whether or not Jean could handle that much power was the question to be answered, and the apparent answer was no. Her savage "battle-lust" tendencies were linked to an inner evil within Jean's soul, an evil at the core of all humanity. Why her powers should be connected to this evil center wasn't said, but as Mastermind brought this hidden corruption to the surface, Jean's powers increased. Why Mastermind should want to free the evil side of Jean is also questionable. He was doing fine when he was seducing Jean into believing she was in love with him; one would guess that an honorable Jean, thinking herself in love with Mastermind, would be more likely to obey him than a corrupt Jean—but then Mastermind had never been particularly intelligent.

Throughout all this, Mastermind's handling had been intriguing. He swept past Jean Grey's considerable mental defenses and projected illusions directly into her mind—through, we learned much later, a machine built by the White Queen. We were expected to accept that an artificially-induced, amateur telepath is capable of deluding an extremely powerful, experienced one. This flimsy explanation would not have even been reasonable, much less accepted by the reading public, were it not that it came at the ***end*** of Mastermind's machinations, when there was too much else going on to notice minor details. (Mastermind's newfound abilities were not mine at the time of his reintroduction into the plotline, but by the end of it, Jean's freed inner corruption takes up so much space that everything else is incidental.)

Jean's relationship with Scott was resurrected for four panels in #129. After much mutual mistrust and worrying, they declared their love for one another, tying Phoenix into the New X-Men once more. Without that scene, the following heavy emphasis on Phoenix and her troubles would have been ridiculous. Since she was unable to function as a team member, there had to be some reason for her to stay around in the book. Nevertheless, her relationship with Scott was still not what it had been. Though Jean was aware of a connection between her timeslips (the creations of Mastermind) and the Hellfire Club (who attacked the New X-Men outright), she didn't tell Scott. She did not turn to him for help in her personal troubles—she may have loved him, but such mutual dependence was apparently only physical (#132), and did not extend to caring for and helping each other through emotional problems.

Jean did tell Scott about the timeslips eventually, but by then it was too late. She had already progressed in her corruption, through the battle-lust and arrogance she originally displayed, up to a total and indiscriminate use of her power, depending only on her whim, not caring whether her team-members approved or not. Just as Scott realized that there was more to "this Wyngarde creep" than met the eye, Jean made her transition into the Black Queen, and under Wyngarde's mental dominion helped the Hellfire Club capture the New X-Men. She eventually threw off Mastermind's control and saved the day (demonstrating more power and ruthlessness than she ever had before, as she sadistically drove Mastermind insane). Cyclops realized (again) what was happening, but he was (again) too late, for Jean's evil core was by then completely in control of her mutant powers. She transformed herself into Dark Phoenix—whom, we were told, was nothing but Jean's own soul, bared, and her own mental capacity, expressed to the fullest.

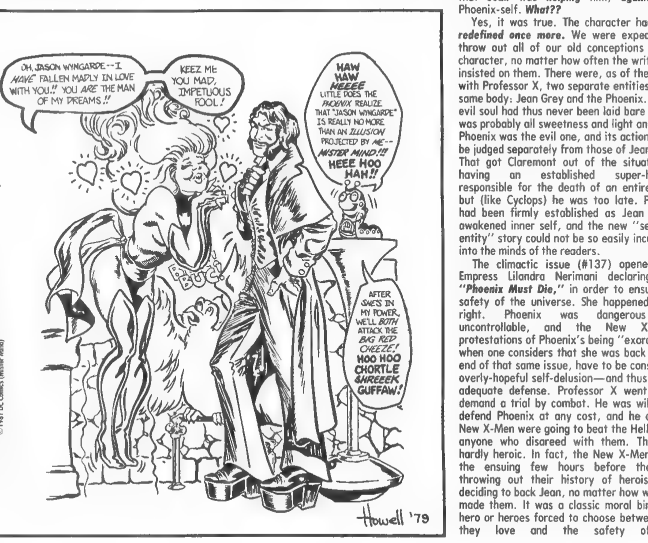
Claremont and Byrne have since listed quite a few different scenarios that might have been used to end the Phoenix storyline. This approach, plotting the finale of a story after the story itself has already been set in motion, is a curious one. It prevents the creators from "sowing the seeds" of the ending in the opening of the story, and each succeeding issue that is plotted with no awareness of the ending limits the choices for that ending more and more, until the ending may be ***dictated*** by what has gone before, whether that ending is desireable or not. Case in point: Phoenix's destruction of an inhabited solar system.

Aside from the fact that Jean was acting very strangely—she attacked the New X-Men, zipped around in space, and wiped out a solar system. Why were these actions the inner desires of Jean Grey? The latter action was the final nail in her coffin, as it were—the final restriction on the story's ending that forced its resolution. Phoenix had to die, or be punished in some degree commensurate with her crime. Remember, that act stemmed from her inner self, and the moral stigma of genocide was thus part of her very soul. Had Claremont and Byrne decided on an ending before the story was in progress, they might have known what acts she could not or would not have committed, and might have kept her clear of those that would be "out of character" in the final resolution.

Curiously enough, it was at that point that the story really fell apart. Phoenix decided to return to Earth because, as a horrified Cyclops told us, "She's hungry." So did she eat ***our*** sun, and wipe out ***another*** race? No, she went to her parents' house. And rather than root around in the refrigerator for some galactic munchies, she shouted at her parents until the New X-Men attacked. Then the Phoenix "goddess" got her power halved by a machine created by the Beast. (If someone slapped a gizmo like that on Thor would it be convincing as a threat?) After she burned out the machine, Cyclops managed to bring the rational Jean to the surface for a moment, until Professor X attacked her from behind. If he was monitoring the battle mentally, he would have known that Cyclops was actually accomplishing something, and that he shouldn't butt in. Nevertheless, he did, and in the ensuing psychic battle, he won. Jean had the same powers he did (plus some), and she had more force behind them. How did Xavier win? He wouldn't have, we were told, except that ***Jean*** was ***helping*** him, ***against*** her Phoenix-self. ***What??***

Yes, it was true. The character had been ***redefined once more.*** We were expected to throw out all of our old conceptions of the character, no matter how often the writer had insisted on them. There were, as of the battle with Professor X, two separate entities in the same body: Jean Grey and the Phoenix. Jean's evil soul had thus never been laid bare (and it was probably all sweetness and light anyway); Phoenix was the evil one, and its actions must be judged separately from those of Jean Grey. That got Claremont out of the situation of having an established super-heroine responsible for the death of an entire race, but (like Cyclops) he was too late. Phoenix had been firmly established as Jean Grey's awakened inner self, and the new "separate entity" story could not be so easily inculcated into the minds of the readers.

The climactic issue (#137) opened with Empress Lilandra Nerimani declaring that ***"Phoenix Must Die,"*** in order to ensure the safety of the universe. She happened to be right. Phoenix was dangerous and uncontrollable, and the New X-Men's protestations of Phoenix's being "exorcised," when one considers that she was back by the end of that same issue, have to be considered overly-hopeful self-delusion—and thus not an adequate defense. Professor X went on to demand a trial by combat. He was willing to defend Phoenix at any cost, and he and his New X-Men were going to beat the Hell out of anyone who disareed with them. This was hardly heroic. In fact, the New X-Men spent the ensuing few hours before the trial throwing out their history of heroism and deciding to back Jean, no matter how wrong it made them. It was a classic moral bind: the hero or heroes forced to choose between one they love and the safety of the


OH, JASON WYNGARDE--I HAVE FALLEN MAPLY IN LOVE WITH YOU!! YOU ARE THE MAN OF MY DREAMS!!
KEEZ ME YOU MAD, IMPETUOUS FOOL!
HAW HAW HEEEE LITTLE DOES THE PHOENIX REALIZE THAT "JASON WYNGARDE" IS REALLY NO MORE THAN AN ILLUSION PROJECTED BY ME-- MASTER MIND OF HEEE HOO HAH!!
AFTER SWISS IN MY POWER, WE'LL BOTH ATTACK THE BAG RED CHEEZE!! HOO HOO CHORTLE SNREEEK GUFFAW!
Howell '79
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world/universe/city/whatever. The hero chooses the universe. The New X-Men chose Jean. The only two whose soul-searchings made any sense whatsoever were the Beast and Cyclops. The Beast agonized over the curious lack of a system of justice, a chance to *prove* Jean's guilt or innocence. What a culture as advanced as Lilandra's was doing without one is something to worry about, but it was not really germane. If there were a sensible legal system, Jean would almost certainly be found guilty. So the Beast, in defending procedure, made the wrong moral decision. Cyclops was wondering if he, in Lilandra's position, would do the same as she, considering the facts of the situation. But then he dismissed Lilandra's concerns as vengeance-driven, rather than being a legitimate worry for the health and well-being of countless sentient beings. And then he deluded himself into thinking that Jean could not be guilty of her crimes *because*-he loved her. It was all very understandable, but it was *not* heroic. The New X-Men were put into the position of championing the deathknell of the galaxy—which made them the villains of the piece.

The we got a punch-'em-up fight, for no real reason. Nothing could really be decided by a fight, since 1) Lilandra had declared to the reader that she was going to stop Phoenix any way she had to (in other words, if the New X-Men won the fight, she'd cheat), and 2) as the Beast said, the fight proved nothing about Jean's guilt or innocence—only who was the more powerful team.

During the course of the battle, Jean became Dark Phoenix again (which she said was "inevitable," thus proving Lilandra's point), and Xavier finally got smart and ordered the New X-Men to stop Phoenix, but of course, it was again too late. Jean killed herself (since she was two separate entities, the good part could and did dominate for a few seconds), showing at least that *she* was a hero, and the issue ends.

The epilogue issue summed up the importance of this event. Scott Summers had his heart torn out, and left the New X-Men to attempt to pick up the pieces of his life. He was (assumedly) deeply affected by it all. The rest of the New X-Men went home, and we were told that they would never be the same again. Why? Because one of their charter members and dearest friends had died? No, because as thirteen-year-old had just joined the team. Jean Grey's death had no real consequence, it seemed, not next to an exciting line-up change.

And the *"Phoenix Saga"* has come to its embarassing end. Through the irresponsibility of nearly everyone involved, an important character has been killed. It was not planned that she should die, and nobody wanted her to die, either. It was just a chain of mistakes that couldn't be ignored.

Since death is often impermanent in comics, Jean may return. There is some talk of leaving her dead for the sake of realism ("You shouldn't bring back dead characters," says the fan who remembers the return of Professor X and other poorly-handled resurrections). However, the *"Phoenix Saga"* as a whole is such a silly mess that it doesn't deserve that respect. Which is worth more, Jean Grey as a character, or *X-MEN #101-138* as an epic? The epic doesn't make sense, the central character doesn't make sense, and the themes of the story change around so often that it's difficult to figure out what the story ultimately says (aside from "Be more careful when plotting comic books"). Jean Grey does not deserve to be buried under bad writing. She should be brought back as swiftly as possible, and in such a way that she is restored to the quality and integrity she had as a character in ***THE X-MEN***'s original run. Scott Summers was right: Jean isn't a murderer, and could never become one, but by our acceptance of her death, we are admitting that she is one. That destroys the integrity of the character, which in turn destroys the integrity of the entire *X-MEN* series. Let Claremont and Byrne take the blame, rather than Jean. Them, and the entire editorial hierarchy that let this "epic" be published.●

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YEAR IN REVIEW

DAREDEVIL

by Brian L. Meyer

I don't think I've ever seen Matt so grim... so cold-blooded. He's not the same man I used to know.
— The Black Widow, ***DAREDEVIL #161***, p. 14

No, Daredevil is not the same character we used to know. In the past year-and-a-half, Daredevil has undergone a renaissance; he's buckled on his swash again after meandering through several directionless years. He is now harsher, grimmer, more fiercely intense than in the past. This year's model of ***DAREDEVIL*** is unquestionably well-crafted; the question is whether the character of Daredevil has undergone a reaffirmation of his roots or a reshaping of them. The answer is a bit of both.

Roger McKenzie's beginnings as the writer of ***DAREDEVIL*** were not auspicious. His work was marked by instant characterizations (Becky fell in love with Matt one issue after she met him) and loose ends (we never learned who hired Paladin in *#152* to track Killgrave). Recently, however, McKenzie's writing hand has steadied—with the notable exception of his handling of Matt's muddled lovelife. What McKenzie has done is to develop a writing style consistent with his vision of the character. He utilizes clever juxtapositions of words (like Foggy's statement in *#160* on p. 7 that Matt wants to be alone and Matt's countering thought that he hates to be alone) and thematic prose; witness his multiple use of the phrase "This one's for you" in *#164* for ironic effect—to provide stories with both smooth pacing and layered meanings.

Moreover, McKenzie writes with a solid vision of the world we see but Daredevil does not. The tone of his words suggests a place where only the foolish, the faithless, and the fearless tread. McKenzie accents this world with varied speech patterns, continuing criminal characters, and constant reinforcement of how fear-infested this world really is (sometimes I suspect McKenzie keeps a file of all common phrases containing the word "devil" just so he can practice this reinforcement). Into this arena steps Daredevil, a man whose self-appointed mission is to bring light and right to this zone of darkness.

No less a partner in the turnaround of ***DAREDEVIL*** is penciller Frank Miller. ***DAREDEVIL*** is a book which, particularly, has been molded by its artists: when John Romita drew

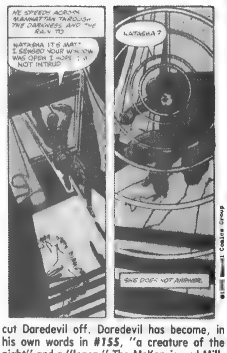
it, DD was a cheerful adventurer; when Gene Colan signed on, the focus became human interest stories. Miller's designs seem most clearly based on those of Bob Brown and Gil Kane, but he brings the book his own unique compliment of dramatic camera angles, tightly focused pacing, and a deluge of moody tableaux. He manipulates light for effect—and to great effect—creating heavy shadows cast from the side, ominous blacknesses lit from below, and even lights staring from behind the panel, reminding us that light, as well as darkness, can be blinding. Miller additionally uses the compositions as a means of underscoring plot developments, as in the sequence in *#163* in which Bruce Banner's entrapment between hostile subway passengers is enhonced by the pressure of the black panel borders. When he breaks free, he explodes out of the subway car, the street above, and then out of the panel in a fine display of the Hulk's rage released.

Together McKenzie and Miller interweave the story and art so that the two complement and layer each other thematically. Two examples of this meshing will suffice. In *#164*, at the bottom of p. 3, we see an unwavering hand holding a photograph and Daredevil's reactions to it in a series of frames while Daredevil verbally responds to the photo's challenge, progressing through ridicule, denial, anger, frustration, anguish, and submission. Either the visual or the verbal information alone would not be enough to understand the complexity of this interchange. In *#166*, p. 16, panels 4 and 5, the Gladiator stares morosely at the hand of Caesar's statue, its downturned thumb symbolizing his defeat, while Betsy speaks of uplifting him by giving him "a helping hand"; McKenzie and Miller demonstrate a deft touch by mingling compassion and irony here.

Above all, the pair—aided nicely by the inks of Klaus Janson—create a mood, a forbidding, unrelenting mood that saturates the book. Taking their cue from early issues of ***DAREDEVIL***, McKenzie and Miller turn Daredevil's blindness into an advantage by having him operate at night, in heavy rain, or in a blackout—turning out lights has become his calling card. The symbolism can be overdone at times, but it is usually handled well, creating for the reader some sense of how a sightless super-hero survives. Inky blacks and blinding whites in the art take on new meaning when used as a conceptual foil for Daredevil's blindness. Even the humor in the book is black: someone says of Judge Coffin that he is "tough as nails."

And there's the rub. The humor in ***DAREDEVIL*** these days is either black or ridiculously slapstick. The sense of fun which once set DD's jokes apart from the wisecracks of Spiderman and other Marvel heroes has disappeared. Daredevil began his heroics as a happy-go-lucky quipster, an outlet for Matt's frustrations and his desire to show off. His "twin" Mike replaced DD in that role for a while, filling it so well that Matt commented in *#28* that he preferred being Mike to be himself. When Mike had to be killed due to plot complications, Matt could still cut loose as Daredevil instead of being cut off as himself.

What McKenzie and Miller have done is to


NO SPIDER-SENSE, MAGNETISM THROUGH THE DARKNESS, AND THE KALI TO
NATASHA IT'S MATT I SENSED YOUR WINDOW WAS OPEN I HOPE I'M NOT INTRUD
NATASHA?
SHE DOES NOT ANSWER.
©1981 Marvel Comics Group

cut Daredevil off. Daredevil has become, in his own words in *#155*, "a creature of the night" and a "loner." The McKenzie and Miller team has reconstructed Daredevil's character by concentrating on the grimmer aspects of his personality. By doing so, Daredevil has come to resemble no hero so much as Batman. There are further similarities: DD's shadow inspires fear, and his vow to his father has become his ***raison d'etre***. These resemblances, when emphasized, bring him too close to Batman for me to be entirely comfortable with his present characterization.

Fortunately, much of what makes Daredevil unique is still there. The most important of these qualities is his high moral sense, and it is present in abundance. Righteousness—and sometimes self-righteousness—permeates the pages of ***DAREDEVIL***. The criminal world is inhabited by the insane: Bullseye driven crazy by a tumor, Dr. Octopus by separation from his arm, the Gladiator by self-delusion. Nonetheless, as Daredevil points out, all deserve understanding, mercy, and a fair trial. More than any other comic book personality, Daredevil is aware of the moral weight of being a super-hero. The tales themselves center on morality: when the infamous story on drug abuse was shelved, it was replaced by a story on the loss of identity in a computer-card society. In a field of comics which seem as laundered of morality and meaning as television, ***DAREDEVIL*** stands out as a book in which questions of right and wrong are continually confronted.

Which is why ***DAREDEVIL***'s renaissance has been one worthy of attention, and just plain worthy. Between the new mood, morality, and mesh of art and story, ***DAREDEVIL*** has arisen as a book which engages the mind as well as the gut. In two of the finest comics published this year, we received a double restatement of who Daredevil really is: #163, the meaning of "man without fear" received

reinforcement as Daredevil fought, and in reality defeated, the Hulk; and in ***#164***, the ***modus operandi*** of DD was reestablished through a powerful retelling of his origin. The latter included the shift in his portrayal to dark avenger. Some might say that this shift is a shaft, and the continuity freak in me agrees. But somehow I can't help enjoying the series as I watch the character, and mystery, of Daredevil deepen and grow. In a time when I have grown increasingly cynical about the staleness of comics, reading ***DAREDEVIL*** is sheer pleasure.

A postscript: As I write this, two new issues of ***DAREDEVIL*** scripted by Miller sit before me. I am most struck by the implausibility of the writing in them. It seems doubtful that the tightly-controlled Matt would be impulsive enough to reveal the secret of his senses to Elektra in ***#168*** after meeting her only twice, and more doubtful still that they could fall in love when her bodyguard can't leave her side. How likely is it that only one store in the whole of New York stocks Slaghter's brand of cigars, and then that he happens to need them in the couple of hours that Daredevil has to track him down? And why, in an issue that repeatedly emphasizes respect for human life, does DD crash a seaplane into a people-filled pier? In ***#169***, DD has the ability to pick out a single cough from an entire neighborhood—fortunately, only one person there has a cough in the rainy season—where once, in ***#10***, he needed a "snooperscope" to aid him. It's clear that Miller, like most artists-turned-writers, needs a good editor; now that we've found the light at the end of Daredevil's tunnel, the last thing we need is to have the electricity turned off. ●

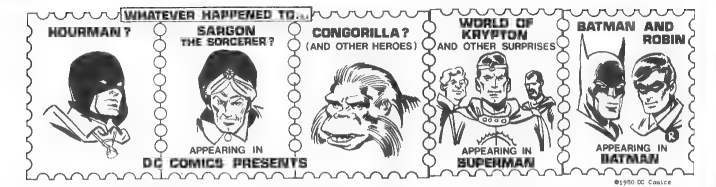
YEAR IN REVIEW

THE DC BACK-UP SERIES

by Murray R. Ward

At least one of the big changes in comics this past year evokes certain feelings of ***deja vu***, even in the supposed majority of fans who dump the habit after two or three years. With the most recent price increase, to 50¢ a shot this time, the two major companies have chosen, by and large, two different ways of giving the reader "more for his money" to keep him buying. With the elimination of many of the advertising pages, more of the current issues can be devoted to the stories themselves. Marvel had elected to present longer stories (or rather, episodes, since the trend to continued stories is by no means slackened by the added page count), which has resulted in at least some titles evidencing a dramatic increase in quality. Those old Stan Lee-and-Kirby/Ditko/Heck/Ayers tales, after all, weren't merely better than much of today's fare because of their novel approach, but also because they were a lot more than 17 pages long...before 1964, longer than 20 pages, even. DC, on the other hand, has time-travelled back two years to the Explosion-turned-Implosion and has revived the concept of back-up strips in addition to the main feature in each of their books. This has been accomplished, though, with mixed results.

Taking the titles one by one, in ***ACTION COMICS*** we have, once again, the Atom alternating with Air Wave and Aquaman—all behind the traditional Superman lead story. These characters have little connection with the Man of Steel except for their Justice League memberships (and Air Wave doesn't even have that), but the idea seems to be to feature heroes whose names begin with an "A" in ***ACTION***, leaving interaction with the Superman story for that character's own title. ***ACTION*** has largely been an anthology title since its inception, and as long as the Big Red "S" gets the cover and the lead spot, it seems to matter but little what follows, so perhaps these features will be treated to a lifespan beyond what they might expect, being under Supes' protective wing. The Atom continues to suffer from an inability of anyone but Gardner Fox to write the kind of stories that once graced the Tiny Titan's solo title—this, plus the fact that, typically, no one seems to know what to do with the hero now that he is married. Air Wave continues to explore the trials and tribulations of a new, underage, fledgling super-doer, of which approach we've seen ***beaucoup*** in ***FIRESTORM*** and ***NOVA***. Would that someone would realize that the charm of the early Spider-Man was in his ability to cope with any odds once he donned costume and web-shooters, whereas his alter ego was plagued with all the social handicaps that Superboy's young Clark Kent only pretended to have. Aquaman hasn't yet moved into the book at this writing, but the liking of several staffers for the character, not to mention his starring status on TV's ***SUPER FRIENDS*** show, seems to assure him a berth ***somewhere*** for the foreseeable future. Whether readers will



take the trouble to follow an ongoing plot in which the hero adopts a new base and modus operandi from one book to another in a seemingly endless game of "pass-it-on" remains to be seen.

The one exception to the back-up reinstatement was ***ADVENTURE COMICS***, which pushed the just-discussed Aquaman to the front, rather than the back, of a book already featuring two heroes, Plastic Man and Starman. In their usual jump-the-gun manner, DC gave the Marine Marvel no chance to bolster their oldest magazine's flagging sales, but almost immediately threw out all three strips in favor of the new "Dial H for Hero" concept. Like ***ACTION***, it seems that ***ADVENTURE*** will go on as long as there is a DC Comics group to publish it, although what series it will contain is anybody's guess.

The second slot in ***BATMAN*** has so far rotated with no set pattern. This, and the arrangement of features in all other Bat-related books, hinges on two factors: the ultimate fate of ***DETECTIVE COMICS***, and the treatment of Robin. Originally scheduled to alternate a second Batman title with cases of the reunited Dynamic Duo together, the main Batman book will now become host to Robin's solo strip as well, it having been ousted from the stripped-down version of ***'TEC***. The nostalgia of a Batman comic with two, or even three, stories in a single issue for those of us who remember the book as it was in the 1950s and early 1960s is great, but will it hold the same charm for the more numerous younger fans? This will depend on DC's ability to present either riveting continued epics, as Marv Wolfman's latest offering is touted to be, or second stories that do not come off as second-string efforts due to their abbreviated length—gth, as sec. string efforts. (The successful exception this, unfortunately, is a dying art among today's comics writers.)

Perhaps supposing that the Human Target was still a staple of ***DETECTIVE*** (before its abridgement), DC did not reinstate that Len Wein-created hero as the back-up in ***THE BRAVE AND THE BOLD***, a slot he occupied two years back. Instead, Cary Burkett was allowed to create a new non-costumed avenger called Nemesis. Such heroes have never been big sales boosters at DC, or elsewhere for that matter, and unless the main story is enough to keep the plainclothes crusader alive in reflected glory, one can perhaps see the beginnings of another "closed series" like the Goodwin/Simonson ***"Manhunter."*** Being a master of disguise whose ***raison d'etre*** is the unavenged murder of his father-figure, the similarities of Nemesis to Christopher Chance are rather overwhelming—perhaps too much so to earn him a continuing series while the earlier character languishes in limbo.

Another secondary strip that is not a returnee from the implosion days is the ***"Whatever Happened To...?"*** feature in ***DC COMICS PRESENTS***. The concept here is to bring back the legion of DC heroes and heroines whose strips are no longer being published—a different one each issue. These literary vignettes are interesting to the older reader who remembers the vanished champions and it is probably also intruiging to those who have never heard of such characters as Congorilla and some of the lesser-known Justice Society members before. What has been lacking in the series so far is that many of the writers seem content to merely present one more case of the forgotten hero, rather than explain where he has been hiding all these years. The Congorilla and Johnny Thunder pieces were notable exceptions to this tendency, and enjoyably so. As for the others, they leave the reader still asking the question, "Whatever Happened To...?"

DETECTIVE, as mentioned earlier, had a veritable army of back-ups ranging from the Human Target to Man-Bat to the anthology ***"Tales of Gotham City,"*** until it was demoted from a dollar-size comic to just another regular title. Shunting Robin over to ***BATMAN*** and the other heroes into temporary oblivion (more future candidates for a berth in ***"Whatever Happened To...?"*** are continually being created at DC), Batgirl was elected to retain the back-up position. ***DETECTIVE*** has traditionally been just a bit more dependent on a good second feature than has ***ACTION***, but the Caped Crusader's distaff counterpart may fill the bill, given the recent improvement in her stories thanks to ***"Nemesis"*** scribe Cary Burkett. Still, the temptation to complain that Batgirl (and the current treatment of Supergirl) are but pale shadows of their Earth-Two other-selves, the Huntress and Power Girl, is a strong one.

THE FLASH also gets its new back-up courtesy of the DC Implosion, but in a roundabout way, since new JLA member Firestorm lost his own book in that 1978 decimation. So far the series has continued in the vein of the character's earlier solo adventures: entertaining, if the youthful hero's naivete can avoid echoing that of Air Wave. With his recent Justice League connection, Firestorm will most likely continue for as long as creator Gerry Conway is interested in relating his adventures.

Like ***ADVENTURE***, the various DC mystery anthologies have added their "back-ups" to the front of the magazine, or at least to the cover spot. It is hoped that continuing characters will help sales of these books to the super-hero-oriented audience, so Johnny Peril returns in ***THE UNEXPECTED***, Doctor Thirteen, the Ghost Breaker, is back, appropriately in ***GHOSTS***, Mr. E makes his first appearance in ***SECRETS OF HAUNTED HOUSE***, and I, Vampire premieres in ***HOUSE OF MYSTERY***. It's too early to tell, but the possibility of these features having any effect on the longevity of their parent titles has traditionally been nil. If the basic theme of horror palls on a reader, it is unlikely that regular characters involved in pursuing that theme will thrill him, as Marvel discovered with their now-you-see-'em, now-you-don't monster line a few years back.

The war books have gone back to the past for their subsidiary features, reviving Enemy Ace in ***UNKNOWN SOLDIER***, ***"The War That Time Forgot"***, in ***WEIRD WAR***, and creating the Creature Commandos for that same title. Luckily, these titles, along with the SF anthology ***MYSTERY IN SPACE***, will not be crippled in the case of a back-up being unavailable for a given issue, as a non-series tale can easily be substituted with no loss of continuity or audience. Like the mystery books, the war and SF and western offerings (***JONAH HEX*** plays sometimes host to the cancelled Scalphunter) seem immune to effect by the presence of back-ups. Either the main feature or the theme of the collections sells the books with neither help nor hindrance from these features, whose only great hope is that they may yield a new genre character with the starring appeal of a Sgt. Rock or Jonah Hex.

GREEN LANTERN boasts one of the better back-ups, having inherited Adam Strange from his pre-Implosion slot in the defunct ***STAR HUNTERS***. Although Adam might seem slightly more at home in ***THE FLASH***, or in ***MYSTERY IN SPACE***, he fits well here with the nostalgia of old ***GL*** plot elements being revived under Marv

THE WONDERTWINS
JACK O'LANTERN HERO OF IRELAND
THE SERAPH HERO OF ISRAEL
KRYPTO THE SUPERDOG
THE MISADVENTURES OF SUPERBABY (AND OTHER SURPRISES)
APPEARING IN ALTERNATING ISSUES OF SUPER FRIENDS
APPEARING IN ALTERNATING ISSUES OF SUPERBOY
©1980 DC Comics

Wolfman. Adam's adventures are an ongoing ***"Whatever Happened To...?"*** series, and this, too echoes the ***GL*** feature's 1960s revival-fever (as exemplified by the recent reappearances of Eclipso, Space Ranger, and the 58th-century GL gambit).

Wisely, DC decided to go the Marvel route of no back-ups with certain titles. Of course, the giant-sized ***SUPERMAN FAMILY*** and ***WORLD'S FINEST COMICS*** needed no added strips, but except for occasional solo tales of individual members, second features are equally unwelcome in the group books such as ***JUSTICE LEAGUE, LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES, TEEN TITANS,*** and (one assumes) the revival of ***ALL-STAR.*** Team titles have always made best use of extra pages in which to tell a "novel-length" story, as witness the Annuals devoted to these characters over the years. Thus far only the revived Titans have made good use of the additional space, while Conway's ***JLA*** and ***LSH*** continue to wallow in an overabundance of interesting characters whom the writer refuses to utilize in an interesting manner. Only time will tell whether the extra pages will inspire Gerry to produce epics or merely to spread an already-thin plot premise thinner to fill the gap.

SUPERBOY, like ***BATMAN,*** has devoted its back-up to exploring other aspects of the title character, rather than just presenting a second hero in a starring role. This is probably the wisest course, since no other character of note exists in Superboy's time era and inclusion of a 1980-based hero in this title would only become confusing. Superbaby, Krypto, and ***"Superboy's Secret Diary"*** are among the rotating features here.

SUPERMAN, meanwhile, has revived the once-entertaining Mort Weisinger concept of the Imaginary Story, recently kept alive under another name in Marvel's ***WHAT IF?*** series. Again, DC is counting on the rapid turnover of comics readers to present a new generation with such speculations as ***"Superman 2020"*** (in which our hero is the grandfather of a third-generation ***wunderkind***) and ***"Bruce Wayne, Superman"*** (in which Batman's arrer ego replaces Clark Kent). The twist, for those of us who've seen all this before, is that these are ongoing series, not one-shot tales. The only previous attempt at this format was the ***"Superman of 2965"*** series of the middle 1960s. It's hard to conceive of a back-up strip causing readers who normally ignore him to pick up Superman's comic, but outside of transferring one of the strips from ***SUPERMAN FAMILY*** to this book, the Imaginary Tales are the best idea for a feature related to the title character.

E. Nelson Bridwell both enjoys and indulges himself in ***SUPER FRIENDS,*** in which he has not only revived the solo tales of the young Wonder Twins, but has also been given free rein to unleash his previously-introduced crop of international costumed characters, such as Ireland's Jack O'Lantern and Israel's Seraph. Without a doubt, these are heroes who would never make it in their own vehicles, but they are for the most part fun concepts, and Bridwell presents them in an enjoyable fashion. Like the lead strip, these back-ups offer simple and uncomplicated fare for the young readers while evoking 1960s head-trips in the rest of us who remember such supporting characters as Professor Nichols, whom Nelson has reintroduced. With his eviction from ***ADVENTURE,*** Plastic Man is tentatively scheduled to join the list of ***SUPER FRIENDS*** tenants, and given that he too is currently a Saturday morning TV star, he should fit right in.

If there is any theme in the ***WARLORD*** title, it would be "artwork ***uber*** story." The two alternating back-ups here reflect the lead feature in this: one is Jim Starlin's revival of Kirby's ***OMAC,*** inherited from the cancelled ***KAMANDI;*** the other is Mike Grell's own ***"Wizard World,"*** featuring two ***WARLORD*** supporting players in a different fantasy world. As with Travis Morgan's wanderings, the stories are fairly simple sword-and-sorcery (or in Omac's case, SF/doomsday scenarios) stuff, made interesting by the personalities of the ongoing heroes and the illustrative style of the artist/writer. The only real complaint with the book as a whole is that OMAC seems out of place here—but then, given DC's current crop of titles, he would be out of place anywhere.

While it's difficult to think of readers buying a ***SUPERMAN*** or ***BATMAN*** comic for the back-up alone, having no interest in the title character, that's exactly what is now happening with ***WONDER WOMAN.*** A sizeable number of fans who would not normally touch the Amazing Amazon's magazine with the proverbial ten-foot pole are being tempted to invest in recent issues for the Levitz-Staton ***"Huntress"*** strip, whether because they have followed the heroine from ***DETECTIVE/BATMAN FAMILY*** or because they enjoy her Earth-Two setting a la ***ALL-STAR.*** The character has only her minority position as a female crimebuster in common with the book's star, but this apparently makes little difference to her success in ***WW***'s book. The one thing that may kill this series is the possibility that increased duties elsewhere may call creator/writer Paul Levitz away from it permanently.

These then are the DC back-up strips as they stand in 1980. Some of the features are good, some are poor, some are uneven in quality. DC certainly possesses no dearth of unused characters to revive as replacements should any of the current strips fail. In short, the back-ups are a good idea being given a second chance after an untimely abortion in 1978. As one of the few possible sources of originality in a static line, it is to be hoped that they will be allowed to continue. ●

YEAR IN REVIEW

STAR TREK —THE MARVEL COMIC

by Doug Highsmith

In the beginning, there was the network series. This begat the syndication, the residuals, the fandom, the fanzines, the conventions, the books, toys, models, clothes, and games, and—suitably humble in such august company—the Gold Key comic book. And the worshippers of Mammon looked upon these and saw that they were good.

The years passed. The fandom faded not; the legions of Trekkers and Trekkies grew ever greater and more vocal. The comic magazine suffered not the indignity of cancellation. And this too was good. But lo! could it not be made even better? Could not the decade-old television series be transformed into a multi-million-dollar motion picture? Could not the comic magazine be translated from Gold Key low key into an extravaganze of non-stop action in the Mighty Marvel Manner? Would not all profit thereby?

Not quite.

To be sure, some did profit. Paramount and Marvel are probably laughing all the way to the bank (albeit not quite so hard as they had initially hoped). Those who think Marvel can do no wrong and/or would never deign look at a Gold Key comic are doubtless ecstatic to see the Enterprise being piloted by the House of Ideas. This leaves only one group with cause to complain at the results so far—only those who were expecting a reasonably good monthly comic to emerge once the adaptation of the movie was complete.

Were those harboring such wild hopes being unreasonable? Perhaps; but I think not. ***STAR WARS***, after all, did develop into a "reasonably good monthly comic" once the adaptation of *that* movie was completed, so it can be done. ***STAR WARS***, though, had the considerable good fortune of being taken over by Archie Goodwin once Roy Thomas left the book. ***STAR TREK***, on the other hand, has fallen into the grasp of the less renowned talents of Mike W. Barr, Tom DeFalco, "Pesky" Pasko, and Mike Fleisher, all following Marv Wolfman's farewell from Marvel. This totals five writers in ten issues—and a considerably less frequent writer turnover effectively sunk ***SUB-MARINER***, and wreaked havoc on such books as ***SPIDER-WOMAN*** and the pre-Stern & Byrne ***CAPTAIN AMERICA***.

Thus, it should come as relatively little surprise that Marvel has accomplished nothing thus far on ***ST-TCB*** to justify its spot on the Mighty Marvel Checklist. The issues to date have ranged from so-so to downright atrocious.

Of course, one must point out that the contents of the first three issues were largely beyond the control of Marvel and then-editor/writer Marv Wolfman. They merely transferred "ST-TMP" into comics form (actually,

STAR TREK
AN EXCLUSIVE PHOTO HAS JUST BEEN SENT TO US BEAMED UP FROM THE PLANET
HE HAS OVERLAID HIMSELF ON REACHING THE ENTERPRISE!
IMPOSSIBLE!!
©1980 Marvel Comics Group

they transferred the comics version from the ***"Marvel Super Special"*** where it first appeared to the regular comic book format, but for the sake of simplicity, we'll ignore that step). And, as adaptations, they did not have much wrong with them which could not be attributed directly or indirectly to shortcomings in the source material. The movie, essentially, featured Variation #9 on Basic ***STAR TREK*** Plot ***#6*** (***"The Ultimate Weapon,"*** a.k.a. ***"Technology Gone Wild But Brought Under Control by Human Resourcefulness And Spirit"***), and (for its appeal) relied heavily on nostalgia and forty minutes of special effects beyond the technical or financial resources of the original series. Well, the special effects, while nice in and of themselves, could hardly be relied upon to dazzle in the comics version, simply because they had *never* been beyond the technical or financial resources of the practitioners of the four-color Great American Art Form.

This left the story proper (such as it was) the characterizations (such as they were), and the bits of business which has not made it into the final cut of the film but appeared in the comics version, and the artwork to hold the readers' interest. The latter primarily demonstrated two things: (1) Dave Cockrum's art looks only as good as the guy inking it, and (2) Klaus Janson's rather heavy-handed style has its places, but finishing up Dave Cockrum's pencils/lay-outs is *not* one of them. (Later issues would show that the same observation holds true for Ricardo Villamonte and, most emphatically, for Frank Springer.)

Still, while the first three issues of the books were far from classics, there was little in them aside from the mismatched art team to cause major concern. They at least had set the stage. The crew was reunited. The ship was updated and put in fighting trim. To be sure, the Enterprise could not, due to the terms of the contract which brought her into Marvel's orbit, relive any of her old adventures, or even experience sequels thereto. Even so, why worry? There was an experienced writer at the helm and an entire universe to explore. But there was also something waiting just over the horizon which might ultimately prove more damaging to the well-being of the Enterprise and her crew than the combined forces of the Klingon Empire and an engineroom full of Tribbles: the deadly game of Musical Writers (and Editors—two thus far; Pencillers—three; and Inkers—also three, for a total of five different art teams). In terms of quantity, this might be considered an embarrassment of riches; in terms of apparent quality, quite another kind of embarrassment altogether.

This is not to say that the book hit rock bottom immediately after the conclusion of the movie adaptation. The decline has in fact been more gradual, and issues four through nine, while disappointing, proved to be merely dull and innocuous more than anything else.

Issues ***#4-5's*** encounter with the "haunted house of space" is of interest primarily because the first installment proved to be Marv Wolfman's swan song on the book, and in it he took the opportunity to have Dracula put in a cameo appearance (one wonders if this in fact was not *the* reason Marv plotted such a story for ***ST #34***). This allowed Wolfman to disavow the black-and-white version of ***TOMB OF DRACULA***, and go on record as saying that as far as he is concerned the Lord of the Vampires did *not* survive his final confrontation with Quincy Harker. This might have been an appropriate way for Marv to leave Marvel, but was hardly of much use in setting any kind of tone or direction for subsequent issues.

Nor did Mike W. Barr put any discernable individual stamp upon the two issues he did. He does, though, deserve some credit for trying, in issue ***#6***, to utilize some of the previously-observed similarities in intellect and character between the World's First Consulting Detective and the First Officer of the Enterprise by casting Mr. Spock as something of a 23rd century Sherlock Holmes to solve "the Enterprise murder mystery." Unfortunately, the credit goes more for intent than

execution, as the "whodunit" aspects of the story proved rather too intricate to be fully developed in seventeen pages.

Tom DeFalco and Mike Nasser probably also deserve something for their contribution to the Star Trek mythos made in issue **#7**. Not only did they utilize the concept of "temporally transcendental" beings, but they introduced (?) the dread menace of Vega Radiation—"an extremely destructive form of mutant energy" (does this mean that these energies have somehow been mutated, or they they cause mutations?), resulting from "recent nova activities."

Marty Pasko, the presumably "permanent" writer on the book as of this moment, deserves recognition for being the first of its writer to trot out such tried and true *ST* cliches and stock situations as: references to the prime directive (which is apparently in force every third mission or so); the presence of miscellaneous expendable crew members whose presence in landing parties is solely for the purpose of buying the farm; and the appearance on the Enterprise of one of Kirk's (admittedly inexhaustable) supply of exflames.

Somehow, all the various negative threads which had been meandering through the first nine issues came gloriously together in the tenth. ***Everything*** about this issue was b-a-d. The plot and dialogue (including such items as the trouble Spock and McCoy had with their "clogged" Phasers. Haven't they ever heard of "Liquid Phase?") were weak enough, but it was the artwork which really moved this issue out of the all-too-crowded realm of simple mediocrities into the rarified heights of unmitigated disasters. Duranona's figures fall into two catagories—intentionally ugly and unintentionally uglier, while his backgrounds were also of two kinds—minimal and nonexistant. Klaus Janson's inking and Carl Gafford's coloring somehow managed to capture every subtle shade and nuance inherent in the pencils. It was, simply put, a gem of the oft-unrecognized genre of "so-bad-they're-good" comic books. What more could one wish?

For starters, one could wish that issue **#10** indeed marks the nadir of the fortunes of ***ST*—TCB.** One can wish that Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter and Editor Louise Jones take a long, hard look at the accomplishments in this book to date, and come away suitably dissatisfied. One hopes that sales figures and fan letters indicate that readers are growing restless; that they can prod Marvel into making improvements.

Finally, one hopes that Marvel is capable of making improvements on a book that doesn't have the established mythos of the Marvel Universe to fall back on for story ideas. Otherwise, it may turn out that, rather than successfully charting a course "where no comic book has gone before," Marvel is only able to demostrate that it can think of very few places of interest to send a Federation ship of the line. ●

YEAR IN REVIEW

ANNIE

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Since the death of Harold Gray in 1968, his legendary comic strip, ***LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE***, had been in the creative doldrums. None of the new people assigned to the strip had succeeded with it, and for the last several years it consisted solely of reprinted Gray materiol. Then at the end of 1979, Leonard Starr, the creator, writer and artist of the memorable strip ***On Stage***, took over the series (now named simply ***ANNIE***). From the very beginning Starr's ***ANNIE*** pulsed with life, and over the course of 1980 he has grown steadily more skillful in infusing the series with vivid if simple characterizations and a gripping sense of mystery and suspense. A very good case could be made that Starr's ***ANNIE*** is the best strip now on the newspaper comics page.

So far Starr has given us four stories in ***ANNIE***. In the first Sheik Bahd-Simel (a name impossible to speak aloud with a straight face) kidnapped Annie to prevent her adoptive "Daddy," billionare Oliver Warbucks, from implementing his "Lazarus process" for revitalizing supposedly depleted oil wells. One of Starr's virtures is his keen attention to current events; how better to bring ***ANNIE*** into the 1980s than through a story about the energy crisis? Warbucks, his giant servant Punjab, and Annie's eternal canine companion Sandy then went off to the Middle East to rescue her. Annie then went to live in the Washington D.C. area in the home of "Senator Stan," who was unwittingly becoming embroiled in a corrupt scheme by his trusted idol, Senator Lawfty. (Obviously one must have a talcove for punning names to read this strip—and it gets worse.) Next Annie went to live with young widow May Flowers and her father-in-law Poppy (You see? But I don't care: I love these names.). May goes to work for the firm of Big Cheese, International, unaware that it is a front for the Mob. The current storyline has Annie hiding out from pursuing gangsters at the ballet school of...(here it comes) Anya Toze only to run afoul of her supposed assistant, a seemingly all-American boy-next-door type named Skip Smith, who is actually a "lethal weapon" working for the KGB. Skip blockmails and finally beats Anya almost to death. Skip then drives off with Annie, who discovers his secret, while both are being trailed by Warbucks' faithful but equally dangerous agent, the Asp.

The problem with ***ANNIE*** for a long while was that Starr had not found the proper balance between comedy and melodrama. It was hard to take a man with the name Bahd-Simel and with a harem consisting of two middle-aged Englishwomen (one of whom was enourmously obese) very seriously as a villain. "Poppy" Flowers, who thought he was living during World War II, was a one-note joke character who rapidly became wearisome. More importantly, the humor in this storyline undercut its credibility as melodrama. Surrounded by such obvious caricatures of 1930s-style gangsters, May Flowers had to be impossibly naive or stupid not to realize what her employers really were. At the end, Starr suddenly revealed that May and the hero, F.B.I. agent Jed Garr, were in love with each other without having prepared the readers for it in any way. (Annie's own awareness that May and Jed were acting out a cliche romantic scene did not serve to redeem it dramatically.)

With the current storyline, however, all the elements have come together in proper proportion. The humor has been confined to the characterizations of the girl ballet students, and does not undercut the melodrama. Furthermore, Starr has corefully and subtly built Skip into a convincing and powerful threat: Starr keeps Skip's worst violence off-panel, but the author is not shying away from using violence to create a palpable sense of menace. Putting Annie in the clutches of this mysterious murderer, and putting another mysterious threat on their trial (Starr had con-

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VERY LIKELY, SINCE THE POLYMER IS SO CHEAP I TOLD THE ENERGY BUREAU THE PRICE OF OIL SHOULD REVERT TO EIGHT DOLLARS A BARREL...
...AND THEY DIDN'T JUMP AT IT?
...GEE, "DADDY," I GUESS YOU'LL HAVE TO DO IT YOURSELF!
WELL - I REALLY AM TOO BUSY TO PIDDLE AROUND WITH SMALL STUFF LIKE THE OIL BUSINESS, BUT...
HARRUMPH!
HOWARD SINES

...I'LL HAVE THOSE OIL-DRENCHED NEIGHBORS OF MINE GROVELING AT MY FEET! FIRST... WARBUCKS WILL GIVE ME THE "LAZARUS PROCESS" AS RANSOM FOR YOU!
SOUNDS PRETTY SIMPLE, SHEIK...
...AS SIMPLE AS TH' RECIPE FOR TIGER STEW! LET'S SEE... HOW DOES IT GO?... "FIRST... CATCH A TIGER..."
©1981 Chicago Tribune-New York News Syndicate

cealed the Asp's identity from the readers for weeks) creates enough suspense to force the reader to want to know what could possibly happen next.

One of the most surprising reversals I can recall seeing in comics came in the May Flowers sequence when May's gangland employer, who had been busily plotting her murder, without warning dropped dead of a heart attack, leaving her as de facto manager of the "company," since only he and she knew all the figures involved in its operation.

ANNIE is absorbing as pure story, but it also has serious thematic points to make. The first is that of the omnipresence and near-omnipotence of evil. Annie and her friends my dispose of their immediate problems, but powerful, almost invincible menaces still hang in the background, ready to wreak more havoc next time. It is heavily implied that Bohd-Simel was backed in his kidnap plans by the oil companies. (It is thus not only in Marvel Comics that the final panel reveals the true menace to lie in the Roxxon offices.) Senator Stan avoids becoming entangled in Senator Lawfty's corrupt schemes, but he cannot prove anything against his powerful nemesis, who goes to work to wreck Stan's career. May Flowers will be in danger for the rest of her life from organized crime, which Starr depicts as an unbelievably wealthy, unstoppable juggernaut.

The second theme is that of innocence versus deceit. Lawfty betrays the very ideal that he represents to Senator Stan and the public. The "Big Cheese" factory is a front for the Mob. Finally, and most dramatically, Skip fools not only Annie (at first) but ourselves with his friendly, winning ways, and yet Skip emerges more and more as a demoh in human form. Starr quotes Shakespeare in one Sunday strip to the effect that "One may smile and smile and be a villain": this is one of the keys to the series since he took over. Stan, May, and now Annie are the innocents who unknowingly become endangered by their close associations with these deceivers. When the innocents learn the truth, their reaction is rage that such evil could be allowed to exist. Starr has May and Skip complain about what he sees as the impotence of the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. to fight the evils they are supposed to combat, and suggests that more could be done by the agencies if the public insisted.

Interestingly, it is their saviors whom the "good" people mistrust. Jed Garr seems to be an amoral Watergate-type of young executive, at first rather than a hero, and virtually everyone takes the Asp to be a dangerous criminal.

ANNIE is ultimately a strip about the deceptiveness of appearances, and the depths of evil, but also about the importance of friendship and love, such as that between Warbucks and Annie, or Annie and Sandy, or even Annie and her Senate page friend Hucky. In its treatment of evil, love and friendship, even though Starr does not share Gray's political vision, he remains loyal to the spirit of the original ***LITTLE ORPHAN ANNIE***.

Gray's influence continues to be felt in other ways as well. The strip's artistic style is an interesting amalgam of Gray and Starr. Starr of course predominates: the faces, although simplified, are still highly individualized (with a masterful range of facial expressions, just as in ***ON STAGE***) and Starr frequently relies on the close-ups that Gray continually avoided. But it is not simply the famous "blunked-out eyes," as they were called in ***POGO***, that echo Gray: look at some of the tableaux or the night scenes, especially the sequence in which the gangsters pursue the truck carrying Annie. Starr even continues to use Gray's trick of making frightened people's hair literally stand on end.

Starr also seems to understand Gray's characters quite well and captures Annie's self-reliance, Sandy's protectiveness, the Asp's eeriness, and Warbucks' blend of loving fatherliness and implacable determination. Starr perfectly evoked the horror of Annie's partings from her adoptive father when he had Warbucks shot in the back, and returned the sense of supernatural mystery to the strip through his use of Punjab's enchanted cloak.

Like Collins and Fletcher's ***DICK TRACY***, Murphy's ***PRINCE VALIANT***, and Young and Raymond's ***BLONDIE***, Starr's ***ANNIE*** is a superb example of a comic strip that continues to keep to high standards in its second generation. Annie may have been orphaned again with Harold Gray's death, and may never achieve the heights she reached with Gray at his classic best, but with Leonard Starr she has at long last found a new father.●

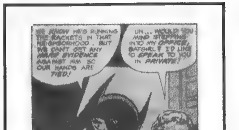
YEAR IN REVIEW

DETECTIVE COMICS

by Murray R. Ward

Any comics editor will tell you that, no matter what stories to the contrary you may hear, the only thing that ever caused a comic title to be cancelled is poor sales. Contrariwise, there are many factors that can be responsible for a comic title's continued publication, of which good sales is only one. DC Comics, in particular, has supported not just one but several of their titles for years out of tradition and sentiment, in the face of somewhat-less-than-terrific sales figures. ***WONDER WOMAN***, for instance, has survived several sales crises over the years by virtue of the title character's value as a promotional commodity in a league with Superman and Batman. And of the company's flagship titles whose publication history stretches back to the Golden Age of the 1940s, only ***ACTION***, cover-featuring Superman, has never been in danger of cessation. Changing formats, prices, back-features, and even lead-features: all of these have been tried in order to maintain the group's other historic titles, including ***ADVENTURE***, ***WORLD'S FINEST***, and the subject of this review, ***DETECTIVE***.

DETECTIVE has been many things to many different fans over the years. For its first 26 issues, it was merely DC's namesake title and their first all-original book, taking detective stories as its theme for an anthology collection with a few regular features, including Slam Bradley, a creation of Superman-originators Siegel and Shuster. From ***#27*** on, it became home to DC's second most popular hero, The Batman, who took over the lead spot, backed by other older features. By the time your humble reviewer came along, Batman's main backup in ***DETECTIVE*** was his fellow JLA member, J'Onn J'Onzz—Manhunter from mars. The ***MARTIAN MANHUNTER*** combined the detective theme of the title with the science fiction motif that permeated the Batman books under editor Jack Schiff. With the coming of editor Julius Schwartz, J'Onn J'Onzz was replaced by another costumed crimebuster, the Elongated Man, formerly a supporting character in ***THE FLASH***. Then, in the late '60s, as the TV camp-craze gave way to the Neal Adams "creature of the night" version of the Caped Crusader, his fellow Bat-characters Robin and Batgirl began to change off as the back-up in ***'TEC*** (as it is affectionately known to its loyal followers). During the '70s, plain-clothes investigator Jason Bard and other JLA sleuths such as Hawkman, Atom, and again the Elongated Man shared the second spot



with Robin and Batgirl, while the title itself alternated between monthly and bimonthly frequency and regular-size and giant-size formats. And of course, the most celebrated *'TEC* backup was Goodwin and Simonson's ***MANHUNTER*** series (no relation to-the Martian), which has recently been collected into a separate volume.

Came the 1978 DC Implosion, and it looked as if ***DETECTIVE*** had bit the biscuit at long last, but the powers-that-be at DC saved the book's bacon by giving its masthead to the surviving ***BATMAN FAMILY*** title, a newcomer with only 20 issues under its belt as compared with *'TEC*'s 400-plus. Promoted to giant format again, Batman's first vehicle now boasted a host of secondary strips: Robin, Batgirl, Man-Bat, the Human Target, such weirdies as the Demon, solo tales of supporting characters like Alfred and Commissioner and Gordon, even at times a second Batman story or an episode of the anthology series "Tales of Gotham City." Nothing ever seems certain where ***DETECTIVE*** is concerned, however, and its history during 1980 has been as convoluted as any of its foremost character's cases.

In terms of appearance, during 1980 ***DETECTIVE*** has sported its original cover logo, its Schiff- and Schwartz-era logos, and finally had the book's name once again almost totally supplanted by that of Batman on the cover. It started the year as a bimonthly Dollar Comic, and then an increase in sales prompted its promotion to the only monthly comic in the $1.00 line. Struggling to keep up with the new frequency, editor Paul Levitz juggled the many back-ups, including even such one-time-only appearances as the first solo Red Tornado strip, in the guise of a "Tale of Gotham City." Then, as suddenly as it had come, ***DETECTIVE***'s day was ended. Poor sales reports, contradicting the earlier enthusiastic ones, caused the title to be cut back to a normal-sized entry, rather than continue as a Dollar Comic of any frequency. Some of the back-ups were shifted to other still-giant titles, others deposited in limbo. Robin will still be highly visible in both ***BATMAN*** and ***TEEN TITANS***, so Batgirl got the nod as the remaining second feature in *'TEC*. To anyone following only this one title, without keeping tabs on the rest of the DC line, the changes must be highly confusing. One never knew who would turn up in an issue of ***DETECTIVE*** in 1980 besides Batman; it seemed like a revival of Timely's ***DARING MYSTERY*** series of the '40s.

As to the main feature, the Batman strip itself, ***DETECTIVE*** has yet to regain the readers among the fans (as opposed to the casual buyers) that it lost with the departure of the Steve Englehart/Marshall Rogers team. (An analogous situation long prevailed with Marvel's ***MASTER OF KUNG FU***, with fans unable or unwilling to believe that Doug Moench and Mike Zeck were turning out a quality product after the leavetaking of Paul Gulacy.) Don Newton and Dan Adkins have been the artistic mainstays of Bruce Wayne's alter ego in *'TEC* this year, while the scripting department has seen tales by Gerry Conway, the departure of Denny O'Neil, and the rising star of Cary Burkett, now also the scribe of the Batgirl backup. Under Levitz's editorship, the costumed villain circuit was relegated to Batman's own title, while stories more in the mystery and detection mode were scheduled for the book which was originally composed of such fare.

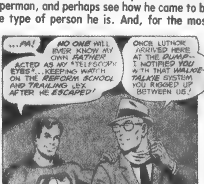
Changes in ***DETECTIVE***'s fortunes in 1981 could be as many and as confounding as those in '80. If the title stays with its present format, however, it should survive (garnering some fannish publicity as it rounds out 1980 with its gala 500th issue!), but at the cost of its unique appearance and flavor. As it now stands, ***DETECTIVE*** is to ***BATMAN*** what ***PETER PARKER THE SPECTACULAR SPIDER-MAN*** is to ***AMAZING SPIDER-MAN***: it has become the "other" Batman comic. ●

YEAR IN REVIEW

SUPERBOY

by Richard Morrissey

In discussing this title, the obvious first question ask is, "Why Superboy?" Aside from the obvious answer that when you have as commercial a character as Superman you can use as many variants as the public will buy, and that the relatively young audience of comic books might well be interested in a young hero, there's the inherent interest of looking back at the earlier days of the famous Superman, and perhaps see how he came to be the type of person he is. And, for the most


...PA!
NO ONE WILL EVER KNOW MY OWN FATHER ACTED AS MY TELESCOPIC EYES... KEEPING WATCH ON THE EISENHOWER SCHOOL AND TRAILING US AFTER WE ESCAPED!
ONCE LUTHOR INVOLVED HERE AT THE DUMP... I NOTICED YOU WITH THAT MALAISE-INDUCE SYSTEM. YOU RISKED UP BETWEEN US!
©1980 DC Comics

part, the people behind ***THE NEW ADVENTURES OF SUPERBOY*** know what they're doing.

Superboy had survived for so long in the shadow of the Legion of Super-Heroes that nobody knew for sure how he'd do on his own. He was dropped from the Legion book, but rather than picking up his life at that time, around the time he entered college, editor Julius Schwartz decided to go back to the traditional concept of his high school years. In many ways, it's fitting that Superboy should remain much the same as he was in the Mort Weisinger days—for however much Superman may have changed in the decade since Weisinger's retirement, his roots are (presumably) the same. As written and drawn by two of Weisinger's mainstays, writer Cary Bates and Kurt Schaffenberger, ***SUPERBOY*** succeeds very admirably in recapturing the 1960s.

Indeed, in a way it succeeds *too* well. Bates includes all *too* many topical references, attempting to pinpoint a time period that ought to remain vague (although I'm told that this is actually editor Schwartz's doing). However long Superman has remained in action without appearing to age much, if at all, he was presumably in high school only for four years—but which four years they were is a question that doesn't have a clear answer. To someone who's seen Superman as an adult meet President Kennedy and Nikita Krush-

chev, it can be rather jarring to see *Superboy* talking about Apollo rockets and Beatles concerts. Mort Weisinger probably handled it best; he very rarely referred to the exact time period but the stories contained nothing that would have been out of place after the time of the earliest Superman stories. Now that Earth-Two has been established, I suppose there's no real reason Superboy should live as early as the early 1930s, but I still think topical references are a bit out of place in a series that, by its very nature, ought to be timeless.

Apart from that, the book has re-established Superboy's high school years just as we older readers remember them, at the same time introducing them to a whole new generation. Superboy/Clark Kent, Jonathan and Martha Kent, Lana Lang and her father, Chief Parker, Pete Ross, and even relative newcomers like "Bash" Bashford are their old selves, with their adventures once again enlivened by those of Superbaby and Krypto. The latter tend to be a bit below par, handled as they often are by writers who don't have quite the ability for that sort of thing that Cary Bates does. (Nelson Bridwell can pull it off; Bob Rozakis can't.) I'd just as soon see the *"Superbaby"* series dropped entirely, as almost all the possibilities have already been exhausted—at the very least he should give up that ludicrous broken English he's spouted since Weisinger's day. Krypto has more potential, but Bob Rozakis hasn't been doing much with him (adopting a secret identity as the Kents' dog is a silllier idea than were all of Weisinger's forgettable *Space Canine Patrol Agents* stories put together). I'd really like to see Bates (or if he hasn't the time, then Bridwell) write *all* the stories in the magazine. Their length could vary a bit, too—how about some issues with three short stories, or two 12-pagers, as well as more full-length novels? Bates and Bridwell could both handle this format much better than the modern bastard 17-page length.

One more trend that is fast getting out of control (and ought to be nipped in the bud) is the practice of having Superboy meet people from his future life. Think back to your own high school years and count how many people *you* met then whom you later encountered as an adult—and then consider that in fifteen issues and one Spectacular Superboy has met (not counting people like Lana Lang and Lex Luthor who are already established Smallville residents) Joseph Silver, Bruce Wayne, Inspector Henderson, Perry White, Hal Jordan, Zatara the magician, and the Clark Kent of Earth-Two. What's even worse is that Bob Rozakis apparently wants to make a *regular feature* of such things! No, no, *no!* On rare occasions it can be pleasantly ironic (and I especially liked the Hal Jordan and Clark Kent outings), but after this there ought to be a moratorium called on this sort of thing through at least ***SUPERBOY #50.***

It also seems to me that at times Martha Kent is too much in the shadow of her husband—she doesn't work and seems to be a full-time housewife, but it always seems to be the busier Jonathan Kent who gives Clark whatever parental advice becomes necessary. Granted that women in the 1950s often *did* tend to be that way, she still deserves more opportunity to demonstrate that Clark turned out so well because he had *two* such wise and idealistic parents, not just one. And if Julie Schwartz insists on moving the Kents' apparent era further and further into the 1960s, he'll soon have no choice but to take the consequences and make Mrs. Kent more up-to-date.

But even in spite of these minor quibbles, ***SUPERBOY*** remains, on the whole, one of the most enjoyable titles on the stands. It may rarely present classics, but it's always interesting and fun to read—a kind of book that was common in the 1960s, but is almost extinct anywhere else in the 1980s. ●

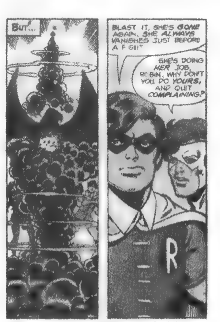
YEAR IN REVIEW

THE NEW TEEN TITANS

©1981 by Peter Sanderson, Jr.

The DC series that in 1980 showed more promise than any other at the company was also one of its newest: ***THE NEW TEEN TITANS,*** created by writer Marv Wolfman and artist George Perez. That series, the third incarnation for the Titans, pairs three members of the original teams (Robin, Kid Flash, and Wonder Girl), all of whom are "junior editons" of leading DC super-heroes, with one long-missing character from a cult series of the 1960s (The Changeling, alias Beast Boy of ***THE DOOM PATROL***) and three completely new characters, all very much products of contemporary super-hero comics (Raven, Starfire, and Cyborg).

The series' appeal so far has lay not so much in the stories themselves as in other elements. The fight scenes are not particularly inventive or dramatic, and the basic plots are hardly innovative: an alien invasion, an assassin out to kill the heroes, a secret organization whose members wear hoods and robes, a new gang of super-villains, and a battle between two teams of heroes. No, the appeal of ***THE***


BUT...
BLAST IT, SHE'S GONE AGAIN. SHE ALWAYS VANISHES JUST BEFORE A FIGHT
SHE'S DOING HER JOB, ROBIN. WHY DON'T YOU DO YOURS, AND QUIT COMPLAINING?
©1980 DC Comics

NEW TEEN TITANS can be found in Perez's striking artwork and in Wolfman's interesting treatment of the characters. To my mind, the most interesting parts of ***TITANS***-stories have come when the characters simply talk to each other, whether around Changeling's swimming pool (issue #2), in Wonder Girl's penthouse (issue #3), or in their handsome new headquarters, Titans Tower (issue #4).

The men have posed problems. Robin and Kid Flash have thus far seemed to be basically blanks, although Robin becomes interesting whenever he directs the actions of the team. He has not pushed the others to do as he bids, but rather he exercises a sharp reasoning ability reminiscent of The Batman's which has a quiet authority with it. Cyborg, alas, has come off as the stereotypical Angry Black Hero of comics. The Changeling has been amusing in his transformations into various animals, but his aggressive (and too-often flat) wisecracking has quickly become wearisome. However, perhaps he will get his opportunity to shine in the upcoming storyline involving the search for his foster mother's murderers.

The women have been much more interesting, and yes, even apart from Perez's skill in portraying their physical charms. (The fact that the team is, to all intents and purposes, equally divided between the sexes is highly welcome. If women make up 50% of the population, why should they not make up half of super-hero teams?) Wonder Girl has been impressive in many ways: she is very skillful as a fighter, she obviously has a clear vision of herself, other people and her world, and she neither boasts about her prowess like some super-heroines, whines about her imagined lack of prowess, like others, nor throws continuious streams of "holas" and other Amazonian expressions at the reader. In short she has seemed to be very much a real person—personable and very capable in her field. Starfire has her appeal in her wonder and joy in discovering what are (to us) everyday aspects of life on Earth, and also in her innocent naivete about some of them, and in her very human feelings of loneliness. Raven has been the most fascinating of the lot. Her costume is a standout for creating an aura of mystery and ethereality. There has been a good deal to like in her ability to take charge of situations, her courage in facing tremendous odds alone, and her deep emotional involvement with her cause. When Raven has found herself on the brink of tears (as in issue #4) it is not because she is in the wrong business (as sometimes seems to be the case with other heroines) but because she has gone through Hell to succeed in a cause. Her reactions at those moments make her seem a real person; it is refreshing for once not to see the hero look simply grim and unmoved in such situations.

Whether by accident or by design, storylines in ***THE NEW TEEN TITANS*** continually have revolved around the relationships between children (or adolescents, if you prefer) and their real or surrogate parents.

For example, Starfire's background provides a new variation on a mythic element central to the origins of Superman and Batman. Like them, Starfire led an idyllic childhood under the care of loving, idealized parents. She lived on a world out among the stars, which she explicitly described as a paradise. But then, like Superman and Batman, she was forcibly exiled from her world of bliss, and, so she says, she can never return to it—but it is still out there, and her family is still alive. Superman and Batman cannot resurrect their parents, but perhaps Starfire can someday regain her former paradise.

The world of Raven's childhood, on the other hand, is very much within her reach, but (unlike Starfire's) it is one of horror. Starfire's planet gives the reader an idealized vision of childhood, while Raven's gives the reader a portrait of childhood as nightmare. Raven's father, Trigon, is an immensely powerful, insanely ambitious, and literally inhuman creature determined to destroy everything in his wife's (and daughter's) background that is not his—namely Earth itself. Raven's mother has her humanity in both senses of the word, but has unconsciously surrendered to Trigon's will, thus abandoning her daughter to challenge his oppression alone. In organizing the New Titans, Raven is in a sense gathering a surrogate family around herself to join in her rebellion against her father.

The Changeling is doubly an orphan. His real parents were killed, and so was his adoptive mother, Rita (Elasti-Girl) Farr-Dayton (along with two other members of his surrogate "family," the Doom Patrol). His adoptive father, Mento, is off searching for his wife's killers, and so in effect, the Changeling has nobody and busies himself playing the clown to stave off the loneliness that haunts Raven and Starfire.

Cyborg is embittered towards his father who made him a half-man/half-machine to save his life. Even Robin has to deal with underlying resentments towards his surrogate father, The Batman, as shown briefly in the New Titans' batttle against their elders, The Justice League of America (issue #4).

The parent-child theme has even turned up in the portrayal of two of the villains: Deathstroke the Terminator (a Batman-like hit man complete with his own butler/confidant and penthouse) and his son The Ravager. The Ravager had no idea that his father was really the Terminator, and yet he admired and even "worshipped" the Terminator, and ended up becoming a super-villain just like him—as if he intuitively perceived their relationship to each other. In this case, following in his father's path resulted in The Ravager's death. The Ravager's fate makes for an interesting contrast with Raven's, for she forsook her father's evil ways, but will live.

Usually depictions of teenage super-heroes either emphasize their independence of parental figures (as with Spider-Man and the Legion of Super-Heroes) or their dependence on them (as with virtually all "kid sidekicks" and in current ***SUPERBOY*** stories). (The original ***X-MEN*** were an interesting in-between case: the teenage heroes usually acted on their own, but they had a "parent" at home who acted as a teacher without the *explicit* emotional involvement one would expect to see in a parental figure.) To treat the heroes primarily as dependents is to destroy much of the appeal they have for readers, who want to see characters acting freely, on their own, combatting adversaries. To treat teenage heroes wholly as adults, though, is to miss opportunities for dealing with the kind of emotional problems that the new Titans series is touching upon. So far ***THE NEW TEEN TITANS*** is steering an admirable middle course.

I would like to see ***THE TITANS*** sharpen its focus on the parent/child themes, as long as it manages to avoid the sentimental. It would also be intesting if the series concerns itself more with the fact that four of the team's members have not only lost their parents or become estranged from them, but are very much aliens in their world (either due to their physical appearance, their origin on another world, or both). I am not as much interested in the cliche situations in which Cyborg and the Changeling could find themselves (**e.g.** prejudice against green-skinned people) as in Raven's and Starfire's attempts to adjust to a world with different customs and different value systems than their own.

Should ***THE NEW TEEN TITANS*** follow up on the thematic material it has established for itself, while developing more real excitement in its adventure storylines, then this series may indeed prove to be very rewarding for its readers in the future. ●

YOU WERE NOT ASSEMBLED SIMPLY FOR THIS MISSION, MY FRIENDS.
INDEED, EVEN NOW THE MENACE IS GROWING ONE WHICH ONLY YOUR POWERS CAN HOPE TO OVERCOME.
© DC Comics

YEAR IN REVIEW

ROM

by Chuck Huber

I ONLY BELIEVE THIS ROM EXISTS BECAUSE I SAW HIM VAPORIZE POLICE CHIEF ROGERS IN OUR OWN BACKYARD! SINCE THEN HE'S KILLED DOZENS OF OTHER PEOPLE! YOU'RE HELPING A MURDERER!
ROM'S NO KILLER, MR. CLARK!
THOSE "PEOPLE" YOU SAW HIM BANISH WERE WRAITHS!
STOP IT, BRANDY! YOU'RE COMING HOME WITH ME -- NOW!
©1980 Marvel Comics Group

For almost as long as there have been comics, comic book characters have been merchandised. There are probably very few items to be found in your average discount store that haven't been adorned with the likeness of Superman at one time or another. And from ***CAPT. MIDNIGHT***, to ***BOB HOPE***, to ***CAPTAIN ACTION***, to ***WELCOME BACK, KOTTER***, there have been comics based on characters of various sorts licensed from their creators (or real life models). Perhaps the ultimate fusion of merchandising of comics characters and licensed comics has been achieved just recently by Marvel Comics and Parker Brothers with ***ROM***, the robot toy which was brought to Marvel as a concept (even before it was marketed to the public) in the hopes that comic book and electronic toy could have a synergistic effect on one another's sales. I have no idea how this strategy has helped or hurt Parker Brothers. ***TIME*** magazine saw fit to give the toy a negative review, but the question here is how well the comic book succeeded on its own merits.

The task of creating a mythos for Rom was given to Bill Mantlo, who had previously fashioned a considerable success with the ***MICRONAUTS*** book. With Rom, Mantlo had considerably less to start with than with the Micronauts, which came with a whole cast of characters already extant to stimulate the thought processes. The mythos which he developed is a logical extrapolation of the demands on a long-running comic book.

Given: Rom is a cyborg "Spaceknight," a robotic-looking alien being. In that case, will the story be set on Earth or on an alien world? All in all, ***STAR WARS*** to the contrary, the chances of success are rather greater for a book set on Earth, providing the opportunity for at least some conventional super-hero situation. Given that, why then has Rom come to Earth? The rationale chosen, the pursuit of an enemy, doesn't seem very novel, since the vengeance motive is so common among comic characters. But by making Rom a soldier in an intergalactic war, it becomes reasonable that the character is a fighter, not averse to slugging it out in tried-and-true fashion. On the other hand, his "enemy" is not humanity, which avoids the need for him to "see the light" *a la* Captain Mar-Vell. The nature of his enemies was chosen well also. If it was a single being, or a small group, the dramatically inevitable final confrontation would then pose the problem of why Rom would remain on Earth. Even such well-executed strips as ***MICRONAUTS***, ***CONAUTS*** and ***MASTER OF KUNG FU*** have a slight air of marking time in between appearances of Baron Karza or Dr. Fu Manchu. With the widely-dispersed menace of the Dire Wraiths, it is plausible that Rom will have a mission on Earth for sometime to come.

The nature of the Dire Wraiths also provided the key to another question in setting up the strip: Should it take place in the Marvel Universe (a la ***SHOGUN WARRIORS***, and ***MICRONAUTS***) or on an independent version of Earth? Clearly, the former is more attractive to the Powers-that-Be at Marvel. Not only does it provide opportunities to lure readers to the new strip through the appearance of Marvel guest stars, but it also seems to be considered philosophically desirable to integrate everything possible into the Marvel Universe. By the nature of the Dire Wraiths, Mantlo has made it possible for Rom to encounter a wide spectrum of Marvel super-humanity: the Dire Wraiths seem to have infiltrated everywhere. At the same time, he has provided a more-reasonable-than-usual explanation for why Rom will come into conflict with his fellow super-doers: to the eyes of everyone else on Earth, Rom has been blithely slaughtering innocent humans.

All in all, the set-up and premise of the strip has been competently handled. The question now becomes whether the team of Mantlo and Sal Buscema have executed the concepts well. Unlike its predecessor, ***MICRONAUTS***, ***ROM*** has not become an immediate fan-favorite. I suspect that the prime reason is the art of Sal. Buscema. His style is not as slick or nicely detailed as that of Mike Golden. However, I like Buscema's art, remembering fondly his first pencilling on the ***AVENGERS***, his work with Steve Englehart on ***CAPTAIN AMERICA***, and also his superb inking work over brother John's pencils on ***SILVER SURFER***. Far more fans tend to remember his layouts as inked by such diverse hands as Vince Colletta and Mike Esposito, which accounts for the low esteem in which he is held, compared to the Byrnes and Goldens of the field (at least by Joe Average Fan). His art on ***ROM*** has been some of the best in recent years, with his inks adding a fair degree of fluidity and three-dimensionality. He has done, I think, a particularly good job of expressing Rom's emotion through posing and body movements despite the immobile cyborg mask. Perhaps the need to do so has been an advantage, since his other characters still tend to have a limited range of facial expressions. All in all, I've liked the art, but still rather wish that his pencils were being inked by, say Leialoha (as in the Black Widow four-parter in ***TEAM-UP***) or, better still, Tom Palmer, to lend detail and background.

What of Mantlo's characterizations? Many readers have noted a likeness between Rom and the Silver Surfer. Both are silvery aliens,

fighting for a humanity which by and large hates and fears them. However, Mantlo has not simply cloned the Surfer. A great degree of nobility and self-sacrifice is to be expected in one who has renounced his humanity, first to save his own race (***ROM* #1**) and then again to protect the rest of the cosmos (***ROM* #13**). However, he has shown jealousy of the relationship between Brandy Clark and Steve Jackson, and unlike the Surfer, he is not terribly concerned with mercy for his (inhuman, anyway) enemies. Also, unlike the Surfer, Rom doesn't seem to be surprised by the foibles of Earthlings, though life on Galador was seemingly as paradisical as that on Zenn-la. Rom's personality is not terribly well fleshed out yet, but Mantlo seems to be unfolding the character at a deliberate pace. While this can be frustrating to the reader, it is far better than trying to dump a whole host of pseudo-characterizational *shtick* all at once. For the time being, I'm content to let Rom's character build slowly.

In a solo strip, the supporting characters are extremely important. Though it's too early to be sure, Mantlo seems to be taking the tack used in ***TOMB OF DRACULA*** and ***MAN-THING*** of a flexible, ever-changing supporting cast. Brandy Clark. has been around since issue #1, and her fiance, Steve Jackson, since issue #3, but they may fade away after the "wedding." Archie Stryker was introduced in #2 and exited in #11 (apparently, though, there is some mystery over whether the cyborg spaceknights

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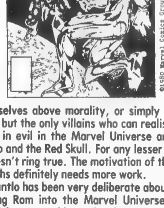
can truly die). Reporter A.C. O'Conner made her debut in **#10**, and seems to be destined to stay around around for a while. The various characters are not very complex, but I think they react like real people and provide the necessary background and contrast for the giant alien in their midst.

Rom's "corporate" enemy, the Dire Wraiths, also deserve examination. Mantlo has wisely avoided making them a monolithic group, and has created an interesting tension between the younger, science-oriented Wraithfolk, and the more sorcerous Elders. On the other hand, we've been given no real clue as to **why** the Wraiths do what they do. Why do they so hate the Galadorians (since even before the Galadorians knew they existed, according to the "origin" in ***ROM* #1**)? Unfortunately, Mantlo seems to be making the Wraiths interested in evil for evil's sake—The Most High One (***ROM* #11**): "We Wraiths use whatever best advances our evil..."—but very few beings believe themselves to be evil, and enjoy it. Some may do evil believing it to be good, or consider



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themselves above morality, or simply do not care, but the only villains who can realistically revel in evil in the Marvel Universe are Mephisto and the Red Skull. For any lesser types, it doesn't ring true. The motivation of the Dire Wraiths definitely needs more work.

Mantlo has been very deliberate about integrating Rom into the Marvel Universe. It is gratifying to see him resist the temptation to toss in Spider-Man or the Hulk at the earliest opportunity. S.H.I.E.L.D. was mentioned in issue **#2**, and did not get further involved until **#12**, when they asked Jack of Hearts to find Rom. This is reasonable, since up to that point, the Wraith-S.H.E.I.L.D. agent Kraller would have been maneuvering to suppress their interest in the Rom problem. Since then, Rom is presumed dead, so Nick Fury won't be getting upset until Rom again makes himself conspicuous. Similarly there is no compelling reason for the super-heroic population to go searching for him at this point. This "take-it-slow" approach has allowed Rom to slowly become aware that Earth is not as technologically backward as it seems. Mantlo seems to be fully aware of the various intriguing possibili-

THEN YOURS IS THE POWER MY ENERGY ANALYZER DETECTED. WHO ARE YOU--
--AND WHY DO YOU HATE THE WRAITHS WITH A FEROCITY THAT EQUALS MY OWN ?
MY HATRED FOR THE WRAITHS SURPASSES ANYTHING YOU MIGHT FEEL !
©1980 Marvel Comics Group

ties for interaction with the Marvel Universe, and also seems to be happy to file away suggestions from the readership, if the letter columns are any indication. Encounters with the Surfer, Iron Man, the Vision and Scarlet Witch and Dr. Doom all promise good character interaction and one suspects they'll all happen. Whether the potential there will be fully exploited is another thing. One does wonder why Dr. Strange never detected the Wraith sorcerers, even before Rom came to Earth, and certainly since the Deathwing has been summoned twice. Mantlo is also going to have to decide just how many Wraiths there are on Earth.: Rom encountered seven or eight in Clairton, West Virginia, a town of 14,000. If one assumes them to be evenly distributed, there would have to be about 2,000,000 on Earth. Perhaps the Wraith base destroyed in #3 required a particularly large infiltration nearby, but Clairton still seems to have had more than its fair share of Wraiths. There is also a slight touch of irony in the likelihood that contractual problems will prevent Mantlo's most obvious cross-over—Rom and the Micronauts.

In summary, I like ***ROM***. It doesn't have the epic grandeur of, say, Starlin's ***WARLOCK***, but it does have an interesting character, who is being carefully developed by a painstaking writer, who is willing to act as though the strip has a long-term future, and an artist who is a master of the craft of storytelling. It's not the stuff that comic book legends are made of, but it is a comic that I look forward to reading each month, which in these meager days is not to be scoffed at. ●

YEAR IN REVIEW

MACHINE MAN

MACHINESMITHING

by Kurt Olsson

On the surface, 1980 was a relatively stable year for Machine Man. For a character who had seen his first book (***2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY***) cancelled, his name changed, his second book cancelled after his creator left, and his book reinstated with a totally new creative staff, Machine Man's only major change of 1980—a new writer—would not seem to be such a big deal, but this couldn't be farther from the truth. Upon taking over the writing chores from Marv Wolfman, Tom DeFalco brought a new approach to Machine Man, an approach which included a different writing style than Wolfman's and a new outlook on both Machine Man himself, and MM's relationship with the human race.

Part of this new approach, oddly enough, was a return to the past. When the regular reader of ***MACHINE MAN*** picked up #15 and glanced at the splash page (with a new writer in its credits) he or she was in for quite a surprise. First of all, the splash page (drawn by regular ***MM*** artist Steve Ditko) was a symbolic splash, a device common at DC, but not seen very often at Marvel since the middle 1960s. Second, the narration at the top of the splash was very reminiscent of the almost carnival-like patter which Stan Lee used so often during the 1960s, and that nostalgic tone did not disappear during the course of the story. If anything, it got stronger as the Fantastic Four made a guest appearance. The shocking part of all that came after one compared DeFalco's bubbly style with the comparitively placid writing writing style used by Wolfman during his stint on the book. To say that the styles were different is a definite understatement.

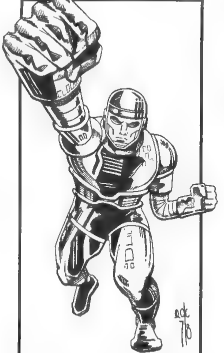
This nostalgia extended beyond DeFalco's writing style for this comic, though. New villains, created by DeFalco and Ditko for ***MACHINE MAN*** (like Baron Brimstone and his Satan Squad), were throwbacks to the villains which Lee and Ditko had created in the early 1960s; Brimstone's Satan Squad was similar to the Enforcers and other villainous groups which Lee and Ditko created during Ditko's days on ***SPIDER-MAN***, and Brimstone himself is reminiscent of the old ***DOCTOR STRANGE*** villain Baron Mordo. The villains which DeFalco and Ditko created were evil, but, by their constant mouthing of time-worn cliches, they seemed to be less of a threat than the Wolfman-created Kublai Khan, whose morbid desire for Machine Man's metallic body made him an almost inhuman monster. The difference between the styles was that DeFalco chose to play down the more "psychological" approach to writing villains (which became more popular in the 1970s) and returned to the lighter tone of many of the early Lee villains. The lighter tone succeeded in giving ***MACHINE MAN*** a levity which had been sorely lacking in the Wolfman issues.

One important aspect of ***MACHINE MAN*** in which DeFalco's nostalgia worked better than Wolfman's approach to the book was in the way Steve Ditko's art was made to work ***for*** instead of ***against*** the strip. Although a master storyteller, Ditko's loose, almost cartoony style sometimes worked against the serious tone which Wolfman wanted. For example, it was hard to take Eddie Harris seriously as Aaron Stack's fail because Ditko drew him to be such a buck-toothed buffoon. Subsequently, DeFalco took advantage of Ditko's artistic style by incorporating its innate nostalgia into the approach which he brought to the book. And DeFalco rid himself of the Eddie Harris problem by simply making Eddie into the buffoon which Ditko had always portrayed him as being.

The biggest difference between Wolfman's and Ditko's handling of ***MACHINE MAN*** does not have to do with nostalgia or the lack of it, though. Instead it has to do with the way they delineated Machine Man and his supporting cast. When Jack Kirby first introduced Machine Man in ***2001: A SPACE ODYSSEY***, he was not only interested in how Machine Man reacted to the human race, but also how the human race reacted to the "living robot." After Kirby left the book, Wolfman steered away from the latter idea and concentrated most of his attention on the former. By ***MACHINE MAN #12***, Aaron Stack was no longer interested in becoming a part of human society, and he began to openly question the worth of the human race. In fact, he was steered away from wreaking havoc on the human race only after he confronted the "gods" whom he had inadvertently created. Machine Man's negative attitude toward man did not lessen, though, because after Machine Man defeated Kublai Khan in #13, he left the paraplegic Khan to die when it was obvious Machine Man could easily have saved him.

Machine Man was not living up to the second part of his name, Wolfman had had him act as if he were above the human race—something which was directly contradictory to the characterization which Kirby had given Machine Man. DeFalco, upon Wolfman's departure, must have seen this problem with Wolfman's interpretation of Machine Man, so he followed Kirby's lead and concentrated both on how Machine Man reacted to the human race, and how the human race—through the thoughts, actions, and words of Machine Man's friends—reacted to him. Wolfman had made Machine Man feel as misanthropic as he did through having him be hounded by Senator Brickman and his cronies, but DeFalco gave Machine Man a better reason for feeling the way he did through having Machine Man's ***friends*** talk and argue about him as if he were an electric toaster. DeFalco, however, also toned down the hatred Machine Man had felt toward the human race during Wolfman's tenure and brought back Machine Man's wish to mingle with man (which Kirby had introduced in ***2001***). Likewise, since DeFalco took over the strip, some members of the human race have been learning a little about themselves: Machine Man's friends, such as Peter Spaulding and Gears Gavin, have become more attached to their "living robot" buddy, and they have slowly been treating him more and more like a human being instead of like an appliance.

This better-thought-out characterization, along with the nostalgic touches, improved a book which, according to DeFalco himself, was eligible for cancellation even before he took over the writing chores. So while the writing change in the life of Machine Man did not prevent his book from dying another death, the change from Wolfman to DeFalco cannot be blamed for the book's cancellation—whatever consolation that may be to ***MACHINE MAN***'s most recent creative staff. ●



"Machine Man was not living up to the second part of his name."

YEAR IN REVIEW

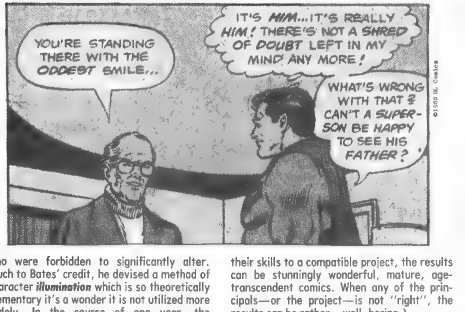
ACTION

by Richard Howell

The Superman character, although prestigious to write, has limitations. Not, as some have stated, that he is inherently dull, or too super-straight to appeal to today's audience, or not even that he is too powerful. His limitations are that the character is forbidden to change—at least as today's comics reader knows change. A character who ***cannot*** get married, whose supporting cast ***cannot*** die, get married, become cosmic, etc. offers seemingly circumscribed boundaries for story material. His adventures must succeed or fail as ***stories,*** not as continuity milestones. Thus the biggest challenge to any ***SUPERMAN*** or ***ACTION*** comics writer is to involve the reader through the stories alone—a seemingly contradictory "anthology" approach to writing about comics' most famous ***character.***

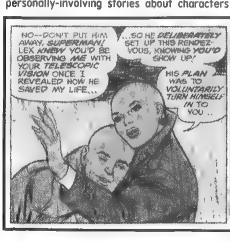
In 1980, ***ACTION COMICS*** saw one of its most successful amalgamations of self-contained stories and subtle characterization. With the ever-capable Curt Swan on the art chored, and perennial ***"Superman"***-editor Julius Schwartz guiding the way, long-time ***"Superman"***-scripter Cary Bates turned out some of the finest stories of his career—and all due to a slight difference in his approach to his characters.

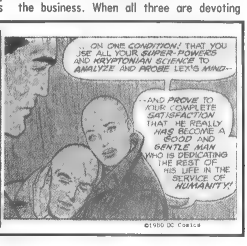
Bates is well-known today as present-day comics' vanguard proponent of the plot-oriented "entertainment" type of story, and to be sure, such a reputation is not undeserved. He became adept so very early at crafting commercially viable "product" stories that he quickly became the most valuable writer for Superman—who desperately needed writers to preserve the ***status quo.*** When Bates decided to deliver "more meaningful" fare two years ago, he was squarely faced with the problem of writing personally-involving stories about characters


YOU'RE STANDING THERE WITH THE ODDEST SMILE...
IT'S *HIM*...IT'S REALLY *HIM*! THERE'S NOT A SHRED OF DOUBT LEFT IN MY MIND! ANY MORE!
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THAT? CAN'T A SUPER-SON BE HAPPY TO SEE HIS FATHER?
©1980 DC Comics

who were forbidden to significantly alter. Much to Bates' credit, he devised a method of character ***illumination*** which is so theoretically elementary it's a wonder it is not utilized more widely. In the course of one year, the ***"Superman"*** cast dealt with questions about: the social responsibility involved in possessing super-powers (#504); the burden of predestined knowledge, and how it can undermine one's natural course of action (#503); the depth of father-son love, even after death (#507-8); the debilitating effects of ignoring, however completely, one's own origins (#509); and the judgmental destruction wreaked by a passionate hatred—even on the one from whom it is generated (#510-2). All of these themes were worked quite seamlessly into complementary plots (in the instances in which they themselves were not the plots) and were all presented with admirable clarity and restraint. (No small feat considering some of the plot convolutions of ***"The Bride of Luthor"*** three-parter in #510-2).

(Indeed, if the Schwartz/Bates/Swan efforts have any apparent shortcomings (seperately *or* together), it's their lack of the slam-bam-pow ***excitement*** with which almost all other comics are infused. Schwartz eschews purposeless violence, Bates soft-pedals purple melodramatics, and Swan is one of the most ***naturalistic*** comics craftsmen in the business. When all three are devoting


NO—DON'T PUT HIM AWAY, *SUPERMAN!* LEX *KNEW* YOU'D BE OBSERVING *ME* WITH YOUR TELESCOPIC VISION ONCE I REVEALED HOW HE SAVED MY LIFE...
...SO HE *DELIBERATELY* SET UP THIS RENDEZ-VOUS, KNOWING YOU'D SHOW UP!
HIS *PLAN* WAS TO VOLUNTARILY TURN HIMSELF IN TO YOU...
©1980 DC Comics


...ON ONE CONDITION! THAT YOU USE ALL YOUR *SUPER-POWERS* AND KRYPTONIAN SCIENCE TO ANALYZE AND PROBE LEX'S MIND!
...AND PROVE TO *HIM* COMPLETE SATISFACTION THAT HE REALLY HAS BECOME A GOOD AND GENTLE MAN WHO IS DEDICATING THE REST OF HIS LIFE IN THE SERVICE OF HUMANITY!

their skills to a compatible project, the results can be stunningly wonderful, mature, age-transcendent comics. When any of the principals—or the project—is not "right", the results can be rather…well, boring.)

Despite ***ACTION***'s high standards, 1980 will be most fondly remembered for two particular stories: ***"The Miraculous Return of Jonathan Kent"*** (#507-8), and ***"The Bride of Luthor"*** (#510-2). In these multi-parters all the strengths of Bates' storytelling style were applied to some emotionally-involving material and the results were worthy of any comics readers' attention.

In the former story, Pa Kent's fondest wish (to see his adopted son's super-career at its established flourish—even if that developed long after Pa's death) was granted by aliens from ***SUPERBOY.*** His reunion with Superman was very touchingly handled, and although the story's "threat" was an unwitting side-effect of Pa's reappearance, Bates rejected any opportunities to milk the obvious "I must stop this villain even if it means undoing my father's resurrection" storyline, and ultimately separated the two plots. The villain is defeated (by Superman's cleverness), Pa "returns" to death after 30 hours (as was his bargain with the aliens), and Clark was left with nothing more excruciating than a feeling of warm, contented, inexplicable communion with his adoptive father. The story was also notable for its pacing (as one proof after another of his foster father's "continued life" confronts Superman, until he finally admitted that it ***must have been true***), its skillful reintroduction and redefinition of the "does Lois know that Clark is Superman?" motif, and Bates' admirable restraint—especially in treating such a thematically emotional situation—in refusing to splatter the page with gratuitous salt-tears, as several less responsible writers would doubtless have done. The Kents' reunion was underplayed and was all the more touching for it.

The Luthor extravaganza involved a virtual jungle of contradictory plot threads. Lex Luthor apparently fell in love with Angela Blake, kidnapped her and cured her of the lethal DXS disease which had caused her hair

to fall out, and, to win her love and respect, ***reformed entirely!*** All evidence, including Luthor's subsequent bouts against both the underworld and Terra-Man (and a brainwave scan by Superman), indicated that Luthor's reformation was real and complete. Then, following Lex and Angela's marriage, the trap was sprung, and Angela and Lex were its true victims. The perpetrator? Lex Luthor himself. The story's labyrinthine progressions involved the reader in Luthor's continuing quest for his new love's respect, his full presidential pardon, and his friendship with Superman—little suspecting that Luthor had used himself as unwitting bait for his own trap, and suffered for it. It was an expert portrayal of the complex moral situation, affecting, and good, challenging reading. ***"The Bride of Luthor"*** series stands as the best Superman story in many years—and probably the best Luthor story ever.

In each of the stories, Cary Bates transcended the boundaries of ***"Superman"*** stories by placing the characters in situations in which their motivations and emotions were clearly and identifiably presented to the reader. And even though at the end of each story nothing had actually ***changed*** (Luthor was still Superman's enemy, Pa Kent was still dead, etc.), the reader learned significantly more about the characters as people. This approach must be difficult to maintain, but when it works, it seems much like having one's proverbial cake (keeping a nice established set of characters) and eating it too (doing exciting things with them).

Because of this sophisticated approach to the definition of the characters—and inventively bypassing the series' limitations which would stop most other comics writers dead—1980's run of ***ACTION COMICS,*** under Schwartz, Bates, and Swan, consistently delivered some of the finest-crafted, most entertaining, and most affecting comics stories of the year. That's a fact about which all concerned can feel justly proud. ●

YEAR IN REVIEW

ELFQUEST

by Paul Dini

One of the better things brought by 1980 was the continuation of Wendy and Richard Pini's ***ELFQUEST.*** From its beginning over two years ago, the Pinis' fanciful epic of trolls, elves, and other beings on an unnamed prehistoric world has remained one of the more enjoyable private publications on the comics market. Only people like Caniff, Harold Gray, and Walt Disney have had similar success at blending their unique artistic styles with action, drama, and humor.

According to a statement made by Wendy at the start of ***ELFQUEST,*** the saga is a story in three five-book units. The first segment, completed in 1979, told the story of the Wolfriders' exodus from their forest home to the desert oasis called Sorrow's End. There, the elf chieftain, Cutter, fell in love with Leetah, the village healer, and the two were mated.

1980 saw the beginning of the second segment, which we were told was the true start of the quest. Having realized that Sorrow's End was known to humans, Cutter and his friend Skywise embarked on a year-long trek to find more of their kind, and a land where they could all live free from man's cruelty.

Through the course of the year, new, important characters appeared, along with an old familiar face here and there. Most important were Ember and Suntop, Cutter and Leetah's five-year-old twins. Ember, a rough-and-tumble tomboy, seemed to be destined to take over the leadership of the Wolfriders. Her brother, Suntop, possessed some latent magic powers which, according to the end of issue #8, will play a key role in upcoming issues. As rendered by Wendy, the elf children were winsome, appealing, and believable. Not as appealing, perhaps, but just as finely crafted a character was the devious troll Picknose, who makes a reappearance in ***ELFQUEST #7.***

And then there were the two newest and most unusual members of the epic: the benevolent humans, Nonna and her mate Adar. They took in Cutter (who is wandering deliriously in the woods) and treat him for his infected bite. Nonna, apparently, had lived near (or among) elves before, and knew their ways. The only humans we had previously seen in the strip had been savage, cave-man-type beings, and Nonna and Adar seemed halfway between them (at least in terms of dress and home life) and Cutter's tribe. My only complaint about the humans was that their dialogue seemed very stiff when compared to that of the elves. Cutter and Skywise bantered between themselves and the trolls in issue #7 in a fairly comical way ("That's a pile of owl pellets!" "Hey, your sending's fuzzy!") but the human's speech in #8 seemed very Stan Lee noble-savage-ish: "See the long, tapered ears, like wings? And here—the four-fingered hands! Is it not just as I have shown you in the symbols?" Not bad, but as long as these people have been established as "good" characters, why not let

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them have a sense of humor, also?

Perhaps as we see more of them, their characters will become a bit more defined. They seem to be being set up for another appearance in issue #9, and I would not object to seeing them join the cast as regulars.

In retrospect, I find it hard to really dislike anything about ***ELFQUEST***. I had trouble with issue #7 solely because none of the elf characters other than Cutter and Skywise appeared in it. They certainly can carry an issue by themselves, but I found myself missing Leetah, Strongbow, and the rest of the gang at Sorrow's End. And that's a good thing, for it says something about their appeal. Wendy and Richard have gone to great lengths to establish each of the elves (at least by affectation, if not in depth) as a separate character, and we can recognize their individual traits: Shenshen is bubbly, Pike totes around a big spear and likes dreamberries, Savah is good-humored and wise (I do want to see an origin story on her sometime) and so on.

Something that the Pinis do to sharpen the focus on their cast is the comic, almost throwaway interaction between the characters. In issue #7, when Cutter, after several mugsful of dreamberry wine, nuzzled an imaginary image of Leetah, his dream-mate turned into Picknose's all-too-real girlfriend Oddbit (ugh). Two panels later, as Picknose continued on about the rules of trollish romanmance, we saw Cutter rubbing his tongue in disgust as a smirking Skywise looked on. Most of ***ELFQUEST*** #7 contained humor of this sort, with the elves and trolls sitting around, drinking, and swapping hard-luck stories.

Any other complaints I have are small ones. I personally do not care much for the design of the elves' village, nor for any of the villagers' costumes. Leetah, with her flowing hair and rippling skirts, eluded my approval for many an issue—mainly due to her overly-fussy appearance. Indeed, one of the reasons I did not start reading ***ELFQUEST*** until well into its second year was that the artwork struck me as being too busy-looking, and I couldn't follow the story. Still, I made the effort, gave it another try, and am a better person for it today. Oh, one other little thing Wendy should watch: In issue #8, Skywise's cheeks seemed to get broader from panel to panel. In some cases, he looked downright ugly. He looks like he must be a hard character to draw anyway, because the facial difference between him and the other elves is rather striking. Still, a bit more attention to those cheeks in further episodes couldn't hurt.

The big question now is what's next for our diminutive heroes. The quest is pretty well under way, and only time (and the Pinis) can say what the future holds. If 1980 was any indication, though, 1981 will lead to even better stories for many double moons to come.●

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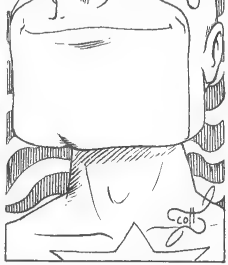
YEAR IN REVIEW

CAPTAIN AMERICA

By Kurt Busiek

When "breathing new life into an old concept," most comics creators try one or more of several methods: Snappy, distinctive scripting, eye-catching artwork, solid storytelling, or a new supporting cast. To this list, Roger Stern and John Byrne have added one: reaffirmation of the original concept. By paying careful attention to the actual concept they were handling, they created the best run of ***CAPTAIN AMERICA*** in years. Not to say that they didn't apply the other methods on the list; they did, but everything in the magazine was directed toward bringing the Captain America concept to the surface, and writing and drawing the book around Cap's core appeal.

Captain America is possibly the quintessential super-hero. Where other super-heroes



character 1981 Marvel Comics Group

fight for truth, justice, and the American Way more often than not, Cap gets taglines like "the living personification of freedom and liberty". His ideals even provide him with his name and costume, something that even Superman can't claim. This has led to some writers treating Cap as a characterless spokesman for ideals, something of an abstract super-hero, representing the core around which other heroes are built. This makes for a boring character, since it guarantees that everyone else will have what this character has, and then some. Roger Stern, however, realizing that a spokesman for ideals must nevertheless have a personality, built a heroic personality for his Captain America. His Cap is self-assured, competent, and a commanding, impressive figure. Everyday people regard him with stunned awe ("Yeah, it's really him! I think I'm gonna die!") and even S.H.I.E.L.D. agents wilt before his charisma. He does not whine to himself in battle as does Spider-Man, and he is rarely surprised. He is aware of his own capabilities, and concerns himself with how best to apply those skills, never regarding them as limits or shortcomings. Even with Dragon Man, against whom he is almost totally ineffectual, Cap worries only about the people he is sworn to protect, and never about himself. This Captain America is a hero in his attitude and bearing, and Roger Stern and John Byrne go to great pains to establish this. From their first scene, with Cap running across the Brooklyn Bridge and startling the passers-by, Cap gets special treatment. Captions like: "Powered by nothing but his good right arm, Captain America's shield ricochets down the alleyway..." or "Without a second thought, the living legend hurtles over the side of the building..." mesh with panels of a poised, alert hero who looks purer than Ivory Soap. The creators also had fun with their "impeccable" Captain America—he calls Machinesmith "Mr. Smith", and in one panel, his ricocheting shield describes a five-pointed star. The only time Cap is not treated as a paragon of virtue and ideals is in #252, when he sneaks up behind two thugs and cracks their skulls together. Interestingly enough, Stern has Cap apologize for this underhanded manuver.

Still super-hero antics alone do not a comics series make, and when Stern and Byrne deal with the man behind the mask, they still work from the Cap concept. Steve Rogers is the same man in and out of costume, unlike Stan

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Lee's Rogers, who complained and moped like any old secret ID. And more importantly, he is a man displaced in time. Captain America is not only a super-soldier, but he was frozen in an iceberg for quite some time (longer and longer, as Marvel-time continues to catch up to itself). He was brought up in the Great Depression, the age of the New Deal. People who think Captain America must be conservative merely because he wears a flag would be in for a shock if they studied the atmosphere Steve Rogers grew up in. Anyway, Steve's private life is mostly played out through the romantic clash of his 1930s orientation with Bernie Rosenthal's thoroughly modern personality. He likes Benny Goodman, she likes Nick Lowe. He likes Humphrey Bogart, she probably goes crazy over Christopher Reeve or Mark Hamill. Over a very few issues, the interplay between the two revealed more about Steve Rogers as a person than any two years under another writer (including Steve Englehart). The thirties/eighties dichotomy could supply character material for years to come—and it underscores an important part of Steve's/Cap's per-

sonality. He may be a stranger to this era, but he's a comfortable stranger. He gets by.

The Stern/Byrne ***CAPTAIN AMERICA***s do have problems. The plots in the first few are skimpy, with too much space given to scenes that don't merit it, and the characterization on the supporting cast could be firmed up. But the biggest problem is that there aren't going to be any more issues produced by the team. As of this writing, ***#255*** isn't out yet, but it will be the last Stern/Byrne issue, after which the book will plunge right back into the miasma of fill-ins it was dragged out of. The basis of these nine issues of ***CAPTAIN AMERICA***, the concept, is the sort of thing all comics should be doing. Each book has (or should have) something that makes it special, different from the others, and something that justifies its existence. And it is this that should be the focal point for the series, that stories and character work should be drawn from. Stern and Byrne's ideas for ***CAPTAIN AMERICA*** could have kept the magazine fresh and exciting for years. Instead, it went for nine months. I hope the new creative team has the brains to work from what Roger Stern and John Byrne have established, because they've conclusively proved that a Captain America story is something different from a story with Captain America in it. ●

YEAR IN REVIEW

THE DC MINI-SERIES

by Carol Kalish

1980 could be called "The Year of The DC Mini-series," not so much because the published examples of the innovative format were artistic highwater marks of the industry, but rather because DC released (or began to plan) so many of them. Two limited run collectors' series appeared during the last year, ***LEGEND OF THE BATMAN*** and ***SECRETS OF THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES***, and at least five new mini-series were announced as "being in development."

DC's commitment to the mini-series concept would be more palatable if the projects were aesthetically more satisfying. To date, each of the series' main purpose, to judge from the number of story pages devoted to it, is to provide the reader with a giant, correlated overview of the ***history*** of the parent title. Conceptually, such an extensive use of what amounts to little more than flashbacks and trivial amendations to a title's historical continuity would be tolerable if, as an end result of such a historical obsession, the reader was left with an increased understanding of the featured character(s) and/or the basis of the series' appeal.

LEGEND OF THE BATMAN started off well. Its first installment laid what seemed to be the foundation for a storyline that was centered on the elusive personality and the obsessive drives that make the Batman character unique. However, writer Len Wein wasn't able to capitalize on his promising first issue. By the end of the third installment on the three-part series, Wein, Batman, and the story were buried under a welter of trivial historical bits that were jammed into the storyline, briefly recapped or explained, and then just as abrubtly dismissed back into the continuity limbo from which they had originally been drawn. The reader, unfortunately, has not been treated to anything like an analysis of the personalities of the series' characters. Indeed, since throughout the series, Batman was suffering from psychosis induced by a head injury, the reader cannot in good conscience credit anything he ***has*** learned about Batman's character through the mini-series.

SECRETS OF THE LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES was an even greater disappointment than the Batman series. Unlike the latter, ***SECRETS*** did not even pretend to have a storyline. Instead the series had a plot thread—a rather inefficiently-run "search for R.J. Brande's offspring" which served as sufficient excuse to justify a story which read like little more than an elaborate Legion roll call. Each Legionnaire was called upon in turn and was required to define his/her powers, detail his/her origin, and then fade away into the background. Series writers E. Nelson Bridwell and Paul Kupperberg admittedly were faced with an awesome task when they were assigned a mini-series which starred DC's largest superhero group. However, the lack of imagination the writers displayed in devising a framing device that would both showcase the individual members of the group and still function as an entertaining story in its own right caused the series to be a mere boring catalogue of the group.

DC has adopted a company policy that precludes effective use of their experimental limited-run format. Perhaps the company was so impressed by the resounding sole success of ***WORLD OF KRYPTON***, their first experiment with the mini-series, that they believe that only similiar stories with a similiar historical orientation are appropriate for the mini-series package. DC should realize that the limited-run format can be, and should be, used in for more inventive ways and used to explore storylines that would be inappropriate for the regular DC comic line. Multi-part epics, elaborate cross-overs, tryouts for new characters, and revivals of old heroes would all benefit from the mini-series format. However, DC must realize that the mini-series will only be successful if the format's demand for sufficiently complex stories that justify multi-part serials is met, and when those stories are crafted in as innovative and experimental manner as their packaging. ●

EPIC

ONE YEAR LATER

an interview with archie goodwin

At the beginning of 1980, Marvel Comics announced ***EPIC ILLUSTRATED*** magazine. It was described in Marvel's press release as "an extravagant showcase of the world's finest illustrated fiction." From the beginning, ***EPIC*** seemed plagued with more than its share of production problems: editor Rick Marschall was fired from the project mere months before issue #1's release date, and the magazine was changed from a monthly frequency to quarterly.

The person chosen to edit ***EPIC*** was Archie Goodwin, a former editor of Marvel Comics, Warren Magazines, and a former editor at DC as well. In ***COMICS FEATURE #1***, we spotlighted Goodwin in an interview designed to examine his plans for the big-budget "culmination of Marvel's efforts to collect and publish superior fantasy art in a format which is readily affordable to the escalating number of fantasy art devotees." Now, after ***EPIC***'s first year, Archie Goodwin reflects on the progress that has been made with ***EPIC***, as well as talks about his future plans for the magazine.

COMICS FEATURE: This is mainly a follow-up to the ***EPIC ILLUSTRATED*** interview in the first issue of ***COMICS FEATURE***. During that first interview, you expressed some dissatisfaction with being put on a quarterly schedule. You thought that it would be harder to make a balanced package and that there would be more weight riding on each issue. Did that ever change during the first year (outside of the fact that the schedule eventually did get boosted just recently)?

GOODWIN: Well, no, not really. The first year still involved doing four quarterly issues, so I felt that although each issue got better as we went along, I still thought that the quarterly thing was a problem. I never felt comfortable with the amount of continued material we had, and the continued material was weakened by the long wait between each issue.

CF: Okay, you've also mentioned that you'd like to start experimenting with getting away from the action-oriented Marvel style. Do you think you have been succeeding with that, and do you intend to continue in that direction?

GOODWIN: Yeah, I think I will. I think there will always be some stories that are action-oriented, but there will also be some stories each issue that aren't. It's all part of the balance.

CF: Have you relaxed the original "fantasy-and-science-fiction-only" rule to any extent?

GOODWIN: Not really. I feel that if we can't do good things covering those two subjects, it would be silly to go further afield. We get enough complaints from fantasy-oriented people complaining about the science fiction in the magazine, and science fiction people complain about the fantasy in it. If we would suddenly throw in a private eye story or a western, I can really just imagine the kinds of complaints we'd get. I don't know. I think the magazine would really lose focus then. It would be a little hard for people to get what it's all about.

CF: Too diffuse?

GOODWIN: Yeah. I think we're better off sticking to subjects that are at least sort of interrelated. And then, if we get very successful at this, then I think it would be time to maybe experiment with other things.

CF: And maybe in another magazine.

GOODWIN: Sure. Ideally, I would like to see ***EPIC*** so successful that I could make ***EPIC*** all fantasy, and do a new book that would be all science fiction.

CF: Due to the fact that Rick Marschall was editor before you, you had a big backlog of inventory material when you took over.

GOODWIN: Well, also, when he started buying material and all, they were still discussing bringing the magazine out as a monthly. I think Rick got himself pretty far ahead fairly quickly because of that.

CF: Are you still pretty far ahead in inventory?

GOODWIN: Well, what happens is that every issue we are and we aren't—every issue there's always something I need that isn't here, and there are often a couple of jobs that I can't use in that given issue at all. I still have material Rick bought that I haven't used yet, and also, I'm desperately waiting for

things I've commissioned that haven't come in yet.

CF: And the stuff that Rick bought that you haven't used yet is because it doesn't fit in with the mix of the issue—whatever issue you're preparing at that time?

GOODWIN: Generally, yeah.

CF: Now that ***EPIC*** is actually established and people know what it's like, have you been getting a lot of unsolicited submissions?

GOODWIN: We get a fair number of unsolicited submissions, but I try not to encourage that. Well, maybe now that Jo Duffy is associate editor, we'll have a little time to look over material like that, but generally I don't have the time to give the unsolicited material the full attention that I should. Plus, I kind of like to ***guide*** a little bit. By commissioning stuff, I have a little bit more control over what I'm getting and what's going in it. It's a little easier to plan when you're commissioning your own material. Unless I get something really brilliant in the way of unsolicited material, I stay away from it. On the other hand, I'm fairly open. I almost always make appointments. I don't avoid appointments with people. I look at a lot of material. And, as a result of that, I've bought unsolicited material several times. People have come up to me with samples, and I've bought sample pieces they've shown me.

CF: Have there been any examples of that that have actually been printed yet?

GOODWIN: Well, I'm trying to think...In the fifth issue there's a story by Margaret Gallagher. She and the fella she's living with, they're both artists and writers. They came up and I bought one job from each of them.

Probably also, I think that being an artist certainly helps. Someone trying to sell a script is at a tremendous disadvantage because it takes much longer to look at a script. And also, no matter ***how*** good a script is, unless it is accompanied by art that complements it and really works well with it, you don't know what you've got. So an artist who comes up with a completed job and shows it to us, a lot of times is working from an advantage.

CF: Uh-huh. That makes a lot of sense.

You also mentioned in the first interview that one of the first things Jim Shooter asked you about ***EPIC*** was how could you make it different than ***HEAVY METAL***. It certainly is a different magazine than ***HEAVY METAL*** as they both now stand. How do you think you went about that?

GOODWIN: Well, mostly I just tried to concentrate more on a little more ***literal*** storytelling, and slightly less on abstract or emotional or dream-like material—although I do do some of that. I certainly try to have the stuff make maybe slightly more sense, or at least be a little less interpretive. With the ***HEAVY METAL*** stuff, I sometimes think it's almost like looking at ink blots. I think a lot of the European artists do that to a certain extent—do a story that someone can read as much as they want into it...or as little as they want—and I can see having an occasional piece like that, but not a whole book. Also, in terms of the make-up and design of the magazine, I've tried very consciously to give it its own look, and its own feel as a magazine—you know, like repeating type styles and concentrating on layouts. With ***HEAVY METAL***, I got the impression for a long time that they'd be quite happy with having nice-looking artwork, and they'd be printing the nice-looking artwork, but they didn't run many text pieces—and when they did they had an almost consciously ***undesigned*** look to them. And ***EPIC*** has a very conscious design to it. Like when I ran the Terry Lindall story in issue #3, ***"The Worker in the City,"*** we did quite a bit with designing that, how it appeared on the page. He brought us in oil paintings and we put them in black frames and stuff like that, which I think made it look a lot better than running first the paintings and then the type and all. I think things like that contribute to a magazine's looks.

CF: Something else about ***HEAVY METAL*** which is actually a complaint against them in a lot of fan circles at least is that some issues are entirely repackagings of foreign material and material that's soon intended for American book publication, making it more like a preview magazine than a magazine that's generating its own content.

GOODWIN: I don't think that's quite as true with ***HEAVY METAL*** as it once was.

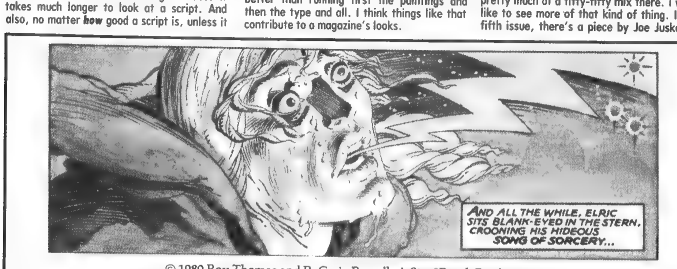
CF: No, but it certainly was quite overwhelming at one time—probably before Ted White took over—but ***EPIC*** hasn't really gotten into that repackaging syndrome at all. Is it due to a conscious choice of because these things haven't been offered?

GOODWIN: Well, I think for one thing, ***HEAVY METAL***, to a certain extent has had a big lock on a lot of the European material, and Marvel is very interested in being able to sell ***EPIC*** as a magazine overseas. Consequently, we don't want to do too much material that's already been sold.

But I would like to put a little more European material or foreign material into the book, and I certainly wouldn't be averse to be previewing a graphic book. We did it with the ***"Elric"*** piece.

CF: ***EPIC*** has been a little light on text pieces as compared to the present ***HEAVY METAL***. Is that again, a conscious decision? Or are you interested in something that is indisputably a ***comics*** magazine?

GOODWIN: No, I think that's often the luck of the draw, rather than the way things have been planned out. I think I wouldn't want to see more than one or two articles per issue, but with the fifth issue, we do a very long interview with the Brothers Hildebrandt. And in the sixth issue, we run a Ken Stacey, Harlan Ellison adaptation that's essentially a text-and-graphic kind of story, so there's really a pretty much of a fifty-fifty mix there. I would like to see more of that kind of thing. In the fifth issue, there's a piece by Joe Jusko and



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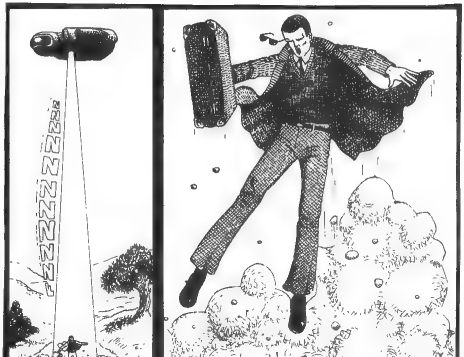


HEAVY METAL: like "ink blots"? 1 x 81 Metal Hulant

Ralph Macchio, ***"Because It's There."*** It's really like an illustrated short story. The illustration is not just inserted with the story running along beside it. We've tried to balance it so that what happens in the text is reflected in the illustrations. I found that a hard thing to do, but we'll probably be experimenting with things along those lines.

But generally, from the mail reaction, illustrated short stories aren't as well received as an illustration or a short story. I'm still committed to one or two more of those things, but in the future I'll probably try to avoid more, and run more articles and things. In the fifth issue, Jo Duffy is going to be doing a book review column, Danny O'Neil will be doing a media review column, and we'll probably add something on fantasy gaming, in the way of a column on that.

CF: Okay, that brings up something else we wanted to ask about. You've run many different types of stories in ***EPIC*** so far; mood pieces, I'd describe some of them as; and there's been a sword-and-sorcery ***Almuric*** and ***Elric***, and there's even been a super-hero story...

GOODWIN: What was the super-hero story, ***"The Silver Surfer?"*** Yeah, I thought the mood of that story was very different than your average super-hero story, though. Actually, I think that most of the Marvel characters like the Silver Surfer fall into more of a fantasy kind of concept. Are you asking if we're planning on using more characters like that?

CF: Partially. Also what have the different reactions been by story category, and are you setting up the game plan for the future based on that?

GOODWIN: Well, we'll probably keep more or less a mixture, because that's actually the way the mail seems to fall. The Silver Surfer story was sort of interesting because the mail was pretty evenly divided on it. The people who didn't like it didn't like it a lot, and the people who liked it really loved it, and it really balanced out almost equally. From a personal point of view, I don't see doing super-heroes in ***EPIC***, because we can do them in so many other areas. I suppose we might do something like...oh, when I was over at a convention in England, someone was asking, "Couldn't you do ***Killraven?***" And really, yeah, we ***could*** do Killraven. It would seem to me that Killraven would fit very well into an ***EPIC***-style story.

CF: It does seem that way. Were you at all informed of the results of the readership survey in the first issue? Was that for editorial purposes or more for target marketing?

GOODWIN: Well, they gave us a copy of the survey on that, yeah.

CF: And did it come out with anything that's going to affect the editorial policy?

GOODWIN: I don't think it came up with anything that would affect it greatly, because the survey was done with an eye toward getting something our advertising sales department could present advertisers. Essentially, the survey showed the average age of the reader, which was somehting like twenty-three. The audience is predominantly male...90%. But it was nothing that surprised me, all that much.

CF: That part, at least, doesn't sound very surprising. But it's nice to have paper work to back it up with.

GOODWIN: Right.

CF: Okay, you now have an assistant editor?

GOODWIN: Associate editor.

CF: ***Associate***, then. There is a difference. How are the duties breaking down between you and Jo Duffy?

GOODWIN: Well, at this point, it's a fairly loose kind of thing. Mostly we've been working together and all. As we go along, I think Jo will probably have certain projects she'll work and develop into the magazine, but essentially now it's great to have somebody to work with. She can do some of the things and I can do some of the things, and that's pretty much how we've been dividing it so far.

CF: How autonomous are you in terms of editorial control as regards either Jim Shooter or Stan?

GOODWIN: Well, so far my situation with Stan is that I'm pretty much left on my own to buy material and put together the magazine. What I try to do every time Stan is in town (which is usually once a month, once every couple of months) is I go over with him what I'm planning for the next issue, or we'll go over the issue which has just been printed, and he'll critique it with me—tell me what he liked, what he doesn't like, what he'd maybe like to see in the magazine. Then we go over material I've selected the same way. If there's a job he liked a lot, he'll tell me. If there's a job he doesn't like, he'll tell me about that, too. Generally, it's like he spot-checks what I'm doing, and I'm sure if he noticed I was doing things consistantly which he didn't like, he might want to get a little more personally involved with what's being done. As long as he's pleased by the results, though, he's certainly willing to stand off and let me do what I want to do.

And with Jim Shooter; Jim tries to help me when he can if I need help with something, and otherwise, he's listed in the book as a consulting editor...and that's essentially what he does. He's been a tremendous help; like if I want to convince management to do things concerning the magazine, Jim is great for helping me deal with that and kind of backing me up on things. If Stan's not around and I need advice on something, I'll ask Jim—but again, we have a pretty much free and easy

exchange back and forth.

CF: Several of the older comic professionals circulating around seem to be naturals to do ***EPIC*** work—Al Williamson, Ditko, Russ Heath, people like that—and yet, nothing by them has been announced or appeared. Is this just the way things have gone so far, or is it sort of a policy to get the younger—and I don't know if you'd call them more illustrative types or what—in the magazine?

GOODWIN: Well, I think one of the problems is that generally the more established artists in the field have a number of commitments, and it's just...Al and I have talked about him doing something for the magazine, he certainly would like to and I'd like to have him. I'd love to have something by Russ Heath, though since he's moved out to the west coast, I haven't been in contact with him. There's no policy against not using someone like that, but generally, to a certain extent, I have to use the people who are available, who have the time and energy to fit into the kind of elaborate job that ***EPIC*** requires. I'm bothered by the fact that I hadn't been able to use John Byrne, who **works** for Marvel. I haven't used Gene Colan yet. I've talked to Alex Toth about doing something.

CF: Oh, that did go through, then?

GOODWIN: Well, Alex is certainly willing, and at this point, I'm holding Alex up, because I've promised to write him a script, and so far I haven't done that. But generally with someone like John Byrne, it's a situation in which he has commitments to regular titles that he works on. This is true with the established professionals; most of them have regular commitments they can't give up for an ***EPIC***, job. You don't want just a squeezed-in job. You want a very good job from them, and they want to do a very good job. So while a lot of people would like to work for ***EPIC***, a lot of times they're kind of waiting until they have two or three months clear to do it—and to a working professional, sometimes it's very hard to find the clear time.

CF: We remember asking Rick Marshall if he was going to be doing any soliciting from Jack Kirby, and he said that that sort of "look" was not what they wanted for ***EPIC***. That's partially why the earlier question was asked. It did seem to be an editorial policy of sorts at that point, but it isn't any more, from what you say.

GOODWIN: No, but if I used Jack Kirby, I wouldn't want it to look just like a Jack Kirby comic book job. I'm assuming in some way, in the subject matter we were dealing with, through the coloring process, through the way we render it and all, somehow we can work out something more than that. I would love to have a Jack Kirby job.

CF: What pieces in ***EPIC*** so far, and this can include ***#5*** and ***#6***, have you been the most pleased with?

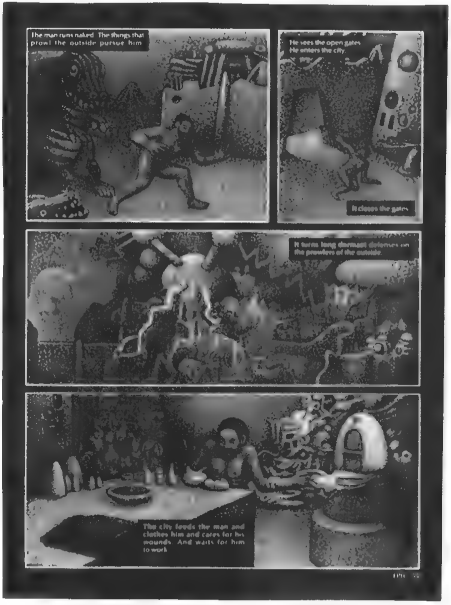
GOODWIN: Oh, golly...once I do them I forget about them. Well, Starlin's series, I liked very much; I think I like the story Doug Moench and Paul Gulacy did in issue #3 was a pretty nice combination of graphics and a good serious story. I thought if we hadn't been a quarterly magazine, I would have liked running "***Almuric***" a little more.

CF: It did seem to take up large portions of the magazine.

GOODWIN: Yeah, if we had more issues to deal with, I would have been happier with that. To one extent, the trouble with being an editor is that it's very hard to play favorites. We had a story by Pepe Moreno in issue #5, which I think is just gorgeous. I like his artwork very much, and I hope he will be producing more.

CF: So it does sound like asking parents to pick their favorite children.

GOODWIN: Yeah, basically, there's probably


The man runs naked. The things that prowl the outside pursue him
He sees the open gates. He enters the city
It closes the gates
It turns long dormant defenses on the powers of the outside
The city feeds the man and clothes him and cares for his wounds. And waits for him to work

"The Worker in the City." According to Goodwin, this is a good example of the consciously-designed look of *EPIC*.

©1980 Terry Lindall (art) and Archie Goodwin (script)

I AM A STRANGER TO UNTRUTH. MINE IS THE POWER ABSOLUTE. GALACTUS HAS NO CAUSE TO LIE.
THEN JOIN ME IN THE QUEST LET US SEE WHAT LIES BEYOND THE COSMOS. ONLY WE CAN FIND THE ANSWER.
THERE IS NO ANSWER.
© 1980 Marvel Comics Group

something I like or dislike about almost everything in ***EPIC*** so far.

CF: A nice general question for the end then: How do you feel ***EPIC*** has progressed in its first year?

GOODWIN: Well, I think it's gotten a growing kind of balance and a little more direction to it.

Issues **#3** and **#4** were both good issues.

CF: They were very solid.

GOODWIN: And I hope we can maintain that. I think now that we're getting into our second year, what we have to start doing is look for ways to surprise people a little bit more, start doing things that won't quite be expected. With the bimonthly schedule, I'll be trying to line up a few more continued features, to give the book a little more continuity from issue to issue—but I'll also be looking, like I said, for a few more curve balls to throw at people, so they won't know quite what to expect when they pick up an issue.

CF: Sounds very good.

GOODWIN: Yeah, it does. Certainly one of the things I'm gonna try and do is more theme work. In the sixth issue, we're planning to do a science fiction issue. We'll try and do more things like that, have an occasional special issue, of some kind—depending on how things shape up.

CF: And see what the enthusiasm is like for that kind of story?

GOODWIN: Well, the science fiction issue is more or less science fiction ***orientation.*** It doesn't mean every piece would satisfy an Issac Asimov fan or a Robert Heinlien fan. It's got the science fiction look to it.

CF: Will there be an all-fantasy issue coming sometime after that, just to test that particular portion of the market?

GOODWIN: It's a possibility. We want to try a lot of different things. Our real problem is finding the right ways to do them. That's very important.

CF: It sounds very much like that ***EPIC*** won't be settling into any ruts in the year ahead. You still have definite plans to keep experimenting with the format and content?

GOODWIN: Oh, sure. You might say that that's the whole purpose of putting out a magazine like ***EPIC***—to keep experimenting. ●

EPIC SURVEY

The reader survey conducted through the first issue of ***EPIC ILLUSTRATED*** has been tabulated. Mark Clements Research Inc, framed and calculated the results of Marvel's attempts to pinpoint the average ***EPIC*** reader, and the results are not particularly surprising.

As was assumed, the ***EPIC*** survey results were published in an advertising supplement and sent to potential advertisers. Marvel has reportedly retained the California consulting firm of Scott, Marshall, Sands, & McGinley to supplement the efforts of its regular firm of advertising consultants, Kalish, Quigley & Rosen Inc., inNew York. As reported in the supplement, ***EPIC*** sales break down into the following regional percentages: the western states 21.7%; The central states 35.4%; the Atlantic states 36.9%; and New England 6%. The supplement further alleges that 72.8% of ***EPIC***'s readers are high school graduates, 57.6% are attending college—or have already graduated, 53% hold jobs described as either professional, scientific, managerial, or proprietorship, 66.6% are between eighteen and thirty-four years of age, and 80% are single.

To no one's real surprise, the supplement revealed that ***EPIC***'s readership was almost entirely male—94.3%. The average income level of ***EPIC*** readers is reportedly $21,739 exactly.

The purpose of the survey, attracting advertisers, seems to have been aided by these results, as ***EPIC***'s recent jump from quarterly to bi-monthly attests. According to sources at Marvel, the increase in ***EPIC***'s frequency is more of a reflection of advertiser's interest than of any reliable sales trends.

The "free gift" which was promised to each participant in the ***EPIC*** survey was a ball-point pen emblazoned with ***EPIC ILLUSTRATED*** ●

THE GREAT CON

Continuity is a much-used and oft-misused word in comics criticism. What once simply meant having a bridgable gap between one issue, one panel, or one day's installment and the next has come to also indicate side meanings like tying up long-dangling plot threads, explaining mysterious concepts, and particularly using past story material as the major basis of current tales. Continuity is a fan hobby, a fan preoccupation—yet few fans can agree on how it should be utilized in comics craft.

COMICS FEATURE commissioned three essays from three knowledgable, opinionated fans about how they each define the concept of conitinuity in comics, and what they think its proper usage in comics should be.

Comic books, like all fiction, deal with characters and events that are unreal. In reading fiction, however, the reader must accept the characters and events as real, at least within the framework of the story. This applies not only to mainstream fiction (which deals with events that ***could*** have taken place, even if they actually didn't) but to science fiction and fantasy, which relate occurrences that would be unlikely or impossible in the present-day world we know. Most comic books, especially those of interest to fans, fall into the latter categories. But even in good fantasy or science fiction, the events and characters should make sense within the context of their own world. We may know perfectly well that birds have never evolved into intelligent beings, and that the laws of aerodynamics make it impossible for a man to fly—but if we imagine worlds in which such things ***are*** possible, we can accept a character like Uncle Scrooge or Superman on his own terms.

Most good fiction relies, at least to some extent, on characterization. This is particularly essential when (again as in most comic books, as well as comic strips, television stories, and some magazine fiction) one has a series of stories dealing with the same character or characters. In order to hold the reader's interest from story to story, the writer must strive to make the characters as interesting and believable as possible, so the reader will have an interest in the characters over and above their interest in the stories themselves.

But if the reader is to have any interest in continuing characters, he must be able to be-

TINUITY FORUM

WHY CONTINUITY?

by Richard Morrissey

lieve in them, at least within their own world—and be interested enough in them to care what happens to them. If he can't believe in the characters, and is reminded too often that neither they nor their adventures really exists, he tends to lose interest in them.

This was one of the major factors—perhaps ***the*** major factor—in the success of Marvel Comics in the 1960s and 1970s. Stan Lee, Jack Kirby, and Steve Ditko placed special emphasis on making the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, and their other characters believable—even though they had abilities possessed by nobody in real life, they had distinctive personalities and continuing (though fictitious) lives. Readers were more interested in Spider-Man than in, say, Superman because Peter Parker was an interesting person, and his adventures and life ***mattered***. Few of the Superman stories (or so it seemed at the time) mattered; it soon became evident that (then) Lois Lane would never learn Clark Kent was Superman, nor marry him, nor break up with him, and Clark Kent would never leave the ***DAILY PLANET*** permanently, and Kandor would never be enlarged. What continuity existed was reserved for minor characters: Supergirl could be adopted and have her existence revealed to the world, Lex Luthor could partially reform, and new members could join the Legion of Super-Heroes—but the major recurring characters like Superman, Lois Lane, and Jimmy Olsen always stayed the same. Spider-Man, and Peter Parker, ***could*** change, and a lot more attention was paid to prior events in his stories than in Superman's. The DC stories did have some continuity, but in general the Marvel ones had a lot more. (I should note that by "continuity" I do ***not*** refer to the later Marvel, and still later DC, practice of making almost ***every*** story continued and beginning a few seconds after the end of the previous issue. The best continuity, as in real life, can be spread out over months and years as easily as over a few days.)

With Marvel's success, DC too began to pay more attention to continuity, and now both major publishers of adventure comics attempt to maintain continuity from story to story, as well as between different titles in the same universe. But, in some ways, DC's more disjointed approach has failed to achieve sufficient continuity to satisfy some readers—and even Marvel, by expanding its own line to such an extent that it's no longer possible for one writer or even one editor to control all of it, has found it impossible to maintain as much continuity as Stan Lee once did.

In many ways, the increasing importance of continuity, particularly between different titles, has been due to the writers' own over-reliance on it. The original super-hero strips were largely confined to their own little universes, and as late as 1959 Mort Weisinger defended the two different versions of Atlantis in his ***"Superman"*** and ***"Aquaman"*** strips by explaining that there was no reason the two characters ***had*** to coexist. But within a year the ***"Justice League"*** series established that the two heroes did, indeed, exist in the same universe—and, in the two decades since then, the two characters (and others who also coexist with them) have met many times even outside regular team books like ***JLA*** and ***Super Friends***. The use of frequent crossovers even outside team titles, again originated at Marvel and later adopted by DC, has made the continuity situation far more complicated: the writers of ***"Superman"*** are now bound by not only what has been established in Superman's stories, but by those of Aquaman, Green Lantern, and other characters as well. Continuity, in other words, is an area where half-measures are indeed worse than none at all.

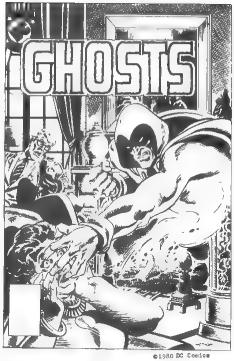
The two publishers have, however, taken different approaches to the matter of which stories are supposed to tie in with which others. Marvel seems to have an official policy that ***all*** its stories take place in the same universe, the "Marvel Universe." The Marvel Universe not only includes all the super-hero titles published by Marvel, but also other types of stories the company publishes—including its versions of characters from prose fiction (like Conan, Doc Savage, and Dracula), humorous characters (Patsy Walker, Howard the Duck), and even characters based on toys (the Micronauts, Rom). Aside from a few licensed properties like ***STAR WARS*** and ***TARZAN*** (which would probably have been brought into the Marvel Universe had the licensors allowed it), literally ***everything*** Marvel has published within the last few years has apparently taken place in one universe, making that a rather complicated place.

DC, on the other hand, has situated its various characters in several distinct universes (Earth-One, Earth-Two, ***et al***), which can be bridged at times, but do not require as much attention to continuity at other times. This practice has been condemned by some fans who consider it overly complicated, but I think that, ideally, it makes much more sense to limit crossovers in this way. It seems that the main reason so many fans object to it is that it's much more liable to be abused than Marvel's single universe. Although the insistence on a single continuity has led Marvel to such excesses; such as ***five*** different men all using the name and costume of Captain America at various times, at least a writer for that company doesn't need to worry about whether two characters ***are*** supposed to coexist. Too many DC writers have simply seized two characters that the accepted continuity states exist in different universes, and brought them together anyway—the most recent example being Paul Kupperberg's use of Doctor Thirteen (of Earth-One) and The Spectre (of Earth-Two) in ***GHOSTS***. I suggest that the editors should pay much more attention to such things at both companies, and prohibit the use of established

characters in such contradictory ways unless full explanations are given.

Some writers have protested these policies when, as has happened intermittently at both companies, they *are* rigidly enforced. Why, they ask, *should* they be straightjacketed in their writing, in their creativity, by what has been established in other, often (in their eyes) inferior stories? I don't think there's any reason they should be—*if* they were creating their own stories, using their own characters, but if they want to use characters created by other people, and refer to stories and events that were the work of others, they should handle those characters in the established way. I'll even grant a writer the right to ignore, or alter, his or her own past work, if by so doing he or she can establish a better or more interesting continuity—but I can't accept a writer being so cavalier with the work of others.

If Paul Kupperberg, for example, had created his own sleuth of the supernatural, his own avenging ghost, he could establish whatever he wanted to about them—and their world. Not all DC stories, especially in a book like ***GHOSTS, have*** to take place on Earth-One or Earth-Two or Earth-S, nor should they. I'd like to see more writers, at both DC and Marvel, create characters and universes of their own, that don't have *any* connection with previously established universes. Mike Grell has done exactly that in ***WARLORD***, and Mort Weisinger tried to do that with the Superman family series he edited, even allowing Superman to appear with the JLA only under protest.



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But if a writer *does* want to use a previously-established character or universe, he owes those characters, the writers and artists who created them, and the readers who follow them, respect. If he's going to take on the responsibility of continuing what others have begun, he should be true to what has gone before, and not unwittingly or uncaringly destroy what another has created. Otherwise, he has no reason to expect that *his* stories, in turn, will receive any more respect from writers in times to come. ●

CONTINUITY AND ITS CONNOTATIONS

by Chuck Huber

Continuity has become a kind of buzzword, loaded with connotations which vary from person to person. Without being a little more specific, it's hard to justly either laud or damn continuity. And since it means such different things to different people, what really requires criticism are the various ways in which people have interpreted, used, and abused the concept.

On the simplest level, continuity applies to just a single comics series. One doesn't have to worry about continuity at all if all one is going to write are unconnected series (a form which dominated the romance comics and still dominates the horror/mystery comics), but in super-hero comics, very few stories have been written for a character who will never appear again (at least intentionally—even the various try-out titles over the years generally had hopes of spawning series). If a series is to be any good, it has to have some degree of continuity. A character who vows never to take a life in one story should not go on a killing rampage in the next story. Character continuity is absolutely necessary to make the character seem real and three-dimensional. Without attention to the history of the character, character development is doomed to be either static or chaotic.

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Within the bounds of a single comic book series, similar considerations apply to supporting characters, recurring villains, and even the institutions and other background detail against which the adventures occur. After all, every comic book super-hero requires some degree of suspension of belief on the part of the reader. That degree of credulity is made easier if all the other parts of the story are as realistic as possible. The stories are indeed fantasy, and comic book science, history, and whatnot need not conform to that of the real world as we perceive it, but the writer should strive for ***internal*** self-consistency as much as possible. It's a case of building up credit with the reader's imagination: if the reader doesn't have to strain his credulity too often, then the occasions upon which it is truly necessary for him to do so will "go down easier." If the story contradicts itself in addition to doing so to the real world, it runs a real danger of losing the reader entirely.

There's a still larger sense in which continuity can contribute to the enjoyment of a series. By providing a wealth of coherent detail, a writer can create the sense of a background universe which has a life of its own, where things are happening outside the bounds of the particular story, and where the reader's imagination can roam on its own. For me at least, that is a large part of the appeal of much fantastic fiction, from the mythic realms of J.R.R. Tolkien, to Larry Niven's Known Space. This kind of continuity takes a lot more time to build up than the other kinds, and

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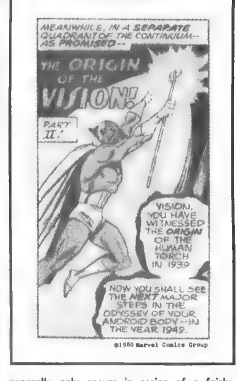
MEANWHILE, IN A SEPARATE QUADRANT OF THE CONTINUUM--
THE ORIGIN OF THE VISION
PART II
VISION, YOU HAVE WITNESSED THE ORIGIN OF THE HUMAN TORCH IN 1939
NOW YOU SHALL SEE THE ABBEY MAJOR STEPS IN THE ODYSSEY OF YOUR ANDROID BODY--IN THE YEAR 1949.
©1980 Marvel Comic Group

generally only occurs in series of a fairly sweeping scale. The world of Will Eisner's ***SPIRIT***, for instance, lacks a strong sense of "background universe" though it is rich in other forms of continuity. On the scale in which Eisner's stories operate, though, they do not need such a backdrop.

So long as one has a single writer handling a single series, continuity is simply another tool in the hands of that writer, one which ought not to be neglected. There are problems that can develop from careless handling, but they become most evident in the cases where continuity has to bridge the work of different series, or even different writers on the same series. This is the kind of continuity that people generally refer to, and is the type that dominates the "Universes" of Marvel and DC Comics. The basic problem that is the hardest to deal with is that of the writer becoming a prisoner of continuity.

At both Marvel and DC, nearly all of the major characters, except for the licensing ***STARs*** at Marvel (***WARS*** and ***TREK***, that is) and Grell's ***WARLORD*** at DC, are more or less bound into their respective Universes. Even such wildly divergent series as ***THE ETERNALS***, ***"War of the Worlds," KAMANDI***, and ***REX, THE WONDER DOG*** have been tied in, more or less firmly, to the same world as Spider-Man and Thor, or Superman and Wonder Woman. The existing backgrounds can provide lots of rich material for a writer to draw from. If nothing else, the ability to call on the Hulk or Batman as a guest-star can always, one hopes, give a new character's magazine some exposure to readers who wouldn't otherwise pick it up. Once a degree of continuity is established, however, a writer will have become used to it, will demand it. And other writers will expect, as a matter of courtesy if nothing else, that their plot threads and supporting casts and even general background not be trod upon carelessly. Conversely, one's own work is exposed to the danger that someone else may screw it up, directly or indirectly. Still, these are problems which a good writer can usually deal with.

Another continuity-related problem which is really more a question of good writing vs. bad writing is the temptation to "tie up loose ends." Dangling plot threads and the like have served as springboards for a number of stories, some of them quite good, some of them not so good. The trick with such stories is to ensure that the "casual" reader doesn't get lost in the welter of detail needed to understand the action. Roy Thomas' ***"Kree-Skrull War"*** story in ***THE AVENGERS*** tied together a number of established story elements, but there wasn't so much going on that a reader couldn't figure things out as they went along. Steve Englehart's ***"Origins of the Vision and the Universe"*** sequence later in the same series was less successful at keeping the many elements from being jumbled, but was still quite readable. Not all have been so successful. This may be due to the fact that "continuity epics" often have lots of characters running through them, and lots of subplots. If a writer is inherently weak on characterization or plotting, these faults will naturally show up to worst advantage.

Then, too, stories inspired by continuity tie-ups tend to reproduce. Roy Thomas tied in the Whizzer and Miss America in his version of the "origin" of Quicksilver and the Scarlet Witch in ***GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS #1***, but in so doing overlooked or chose to ignore certain previous hints at their background. That in turn, spawned the far more complex Gruenwald-Buscema-Austin version in ***AVENGERS #185-187***. The tangled skein of Captain America's career generated first a simple 1960s retelling of his origin by Lee and Kirby, which was followed by the modifications by Thomas, complications by Gerber and revisions by Stern and Byrne, not to mention Englehart's tale revolving around the Cap of the 1950s, and the account of the late 1940s Cap in ***WHAT IF? #4***. What is neatly resolved to one writer may look like a newly-opened can of worms to another.

The most serious problem with heavy emphasis on continuity is one, however, which even good writers must run into, even writers who are in sole control of the universe in question. That is the problem of the accretion of plot devices—sort of a "law of conservation of concepts." The best example of this outside comics is the ***"Known Space"*** series by Larry Niven. Niven himself has complained that it became progressively more and more difficult to write stories set in the Known Space universe, because plot elements introduced in previous stories kept impinging on the new ones. Each race of beings, each technological development previously introduced had to be considered for how it would affect the dilemmas afflicting the protagonist in the new story. The same kind of accretion occurs in the DC and Marvel Universes. The problem's seriousness is highly dependent on the scope of the story. If Batman or Daredevil are pursuing bank robbers, the influence of Pluto or Darkseid on events generally need not be considered. But if a writer wants to have a menace threatening the entire Earth at Marvel, he not only has to figure out why the FF, Avengers, Defenders and New X-Men didn't get called in on the problem, there are also the Inhumans, the Eternals, the Deviants, the cat-people, and vast numbers of other superendowed lost races who might also feel threatened. Similarly, at DC, any self-respecting conqueror of the universe must have contingency plans to deal with the JLA, the Green Lantern Corps, the Guardians of the Universe, the Thanagarians, the New Gods, the Olympian deities, and even the Legion of Super-Heroes if they decide to risk the time paradoxes. Even with the best writing in the world, every new concept added to the existing Universe tends to make it more "musclebound." Paradoxically, that fact makes adherence to continuity that much more important. Every story that a good writer can squeeze out of new permutations and combinations of ***existing*** concepts reduces the need to add to the clutter with something new.

To try to sum things up, I think that continuity is an important and stimulating element in comic book storytelling. If continuity were always observed, and the Marvel and DC Universes were really seamless wholes, nearly all the problems attributed to continuity would go away. However, the existing reality is about as seamless as a baseball or Evel Knievel's hide. Within that reality, there are a few precepts that should be observed, most of which

"BUT SOMEHOW WE SEEMED TO OUTGROW THE WORLD. WE BEGAN FINDING REDS WHERE OTHERS SAW NOTHING--LIKE IN HARLEM AND WATTS.
"IN FACT, WE FOUND THAT MOST PEOPLE WHO WEREN'T PURE-BLOODED AMERICANS WERE COMMIES!
©1980 Marvel Comic Group

Two examples of using continuity angles as plot springboards: *"The Origin of the Vision"* from *THE AVENGERS*, and the *"Captain America of the 1950s"* story from *CAPTAIN AMERICA*. Both are by Steve Englehart and Sal Buscema.

simply amount to good storytelling.

Continuity is at its best when it is inobtrusive. The use of S.H.I.E.L.D. at Marvel, or S.T.A.R. Labs at DC are good examples. They show up frequently in a number of books without a feeling of being forced. An excellent example appeared in Jim Starlin's Thanos saga in ***CAPTAIN MARVEL***. Thanos' motley army of galactic thugs was made up of over a dozen different alien races, ***all of which*** had appeared before in various Marvel stories, some only once before. But it didn't have to be footnoted, and it in no way impaired the story if you didn't recognize the various humanoids running around in the background; it was just an extra treat. Any number of things can be done with supporting characters or background detail which can safely go unnoticed by the occasional reader, while lending a sense of unity and richness for the regular reader who will notice them.

In situations where "loose-end-tying" is to be a major part of the plot, it should still be subordinate to the normal demands of good storytelling. Englehart's "real origin" of the Justice League in ***JLA #144*** was laden with references to odd bits of continuity, yet it worked because he was paying attention to the characters, and added a spirit of simple fun to the story (ah! to see Lois Lane in a pillbox hat again!). Also, writers should not try to cram too much detail into a single story. Even if the writer has seen a way for four or five disparate threads to be tied together, that doesn't mean that it has to be done all in one story. While long-time readers with a taste for detail can handle that sort of thing, other readers are likely to be bewildered, and the story will fail.

MEANWHILE, IN A DORMITORY ROOM AT THE WORLD'S MOST EXCLUSIVE PRIVATE SCHOOL, JEAN GREY IS ABSORBED WITH HER REFLECTION IN THE FULL-LENGTH MIRROR... THE REFLECTION WHICH REVEALS THE NEW MARVEL GIRL!
WHERE DO THE NEW DUDS GO? OH, THERE SHE IS!
WOWEE! LOOKS LIKE SHE WAS POWERED INTO THAT UNIFORM!
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Jean Grey in 1963. According to present *X-MEN* scripter Chris Claremont's theory, at the time of this scene, she was seven years old.

The accretion problem, though, is one which good writing can only soften, not solve. Both companies have massive layers of accumulated bits of business which can make life very difficult for a writer bursting over with his own epic concepts he'd like to add to the brew. Even the very ***age*** of the universes at DC and Marvel is a problem, for editors and writers at both companies have opted for the kind of time-dilation that has Superboy's adventures take place in the mid-60s now, and dates the year of Jean Grey's birth as 1956 (see ***X-MEN #138***). There is a legitimate reason for this, but it opens up a hornet's nest of continuity problems that even the best writers can only hope to ignore.

Therefore, I think that DC and Marvel should be much more willing to allow series to be set up and ***remain*** outside of the established universes. The ***WARLORD*** strip has shown it possible to be a fair commercial success without being tied in to the DC Universe. More strips should be given that chance. (Of course, all the focusing of attention on the Big Two should not ignore the fact that the rise of alternative publishers is accomplishing that very end.) On the other hand, if the writer wants all the benefits of cross-overs and so forth, then he or she should be prepared to treat the existing continuity with a degree of respect.

I have the necessary background, memory and love of detail required to enjoy high continuity stories. Every fandom has a certain element of that, in a grand tradition best exemplified by the Baker Street Irregulars. But whether in Sherlockiana or the comics, one doesn't become attracted to the stuff in the first place because of the continuity. Continuity is a powerful tool in the hands of the writer, but it is not an object for idolatry. As more and more fans nurtured on the continuity of Earths-One-and-Two and/or the Marvel Universe become the professionals writing the books, continuity has become a polarizing issue instead, hence this whole discussion. I hope that when the smoke clears, the promise and problems of continuity will return to the subsidiary role they deserve. ●

CONTINUITY'S OKAY— BUT ALL THE TIME?

by Donna Ugol

The term continuity, as applied to comics, originally meant that key story-telling elements (plot, characterization, etc.) were continued from one day's installment of a comic strip to the next. This gave the cartoonist room and time enough to create and explore intricate characterizations and to utilize the characters in elaborate plots which extended over weeks, months, or even years.

Continuity was important both artistically and commercially. Artistically, it allowed full use of vital story-telling elements (such as the above-mentioned plot and characterization). Commercially, it was a plus to the newspapers that carried favorite strips, as an inducement to buy not only one day's paper, but tomorrow's paper as well (to find out if Pat Ryan would be forced into marrying the Dragon Lady, or if Little Orphan Annie would escape being blown to bits by a bomb).

Today, however, continuity has acquired a different meaning—one with troubling consequences. As currently used by several professionals and many fans, it refers to the unification of a major portion of a comics company's output, past and present, into the depiction of a single "reality" (such as the "Marvel Universe"). Spider-Man can thus meet the Guardians of the Galaxy, and the Hal Jordan-Green Lantern can meet the Alan Scott-Green Lantern, because they'll "live" in the same "universe", just separated by a few centuries or a vibratory plane.

Twenty years ago this sort of shenanigans used to spice up a story. It was fun, and it was also relatively easy to handle. At Marvel, Stan Lee had no problems working in a little interplay between the super-hero titles—he was scripting them all. At DC, this sort of continuity was used infrequently, and usually as a plot gimmick (as in "***Flash of Two Worlds***"). "Universe Continuity" probably left the average reader cold. Few 10-year-olds were going to cheer the reappearance of the Justice Society, and someone who only sporadically followed the Marvel titles would doubtless be unimpressed or confused by the "special" appearances of guest stars from unfamiliar titles.

The fans, however, ate it up. Since most of the reader reaction-mail feedback came (presumably) from fans, and since the new artists and writers also partially came from the fannish ranks, it is unsurprising that the use of "universe continuity" increased.

The problems with "universe continuity" are two-fold. First, the effort involved in fitting everything into a single world-structure produces stories written partially or solely to reconcile minor inconsistencies. A story written not to explore characterization or to offer exciting plot concepts, but to rationalize discrepancies between previous issues of a

THEY'RE SO HUGE AND ENIGMATIC! I FEEL LIKE AN ANT IN THEIR PATH! IT'S A TERRIBLE BLOW TO ONE'S EGO, TO WORK IN THEIR PRESENCE...
YOUR HUMAN BRETHREN MAY NOT SETTLE FOR HUMILITY, DAMIAN! THEY WON'T LIKE BEING SECOND BEST! MANKIND HAS CHALLENGED THE GODS BEFORE!
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Left, Jack Kirby's *ETERNALS*, which incorporated several novel storytelling techiniques, including ignoring the "Marvel Universe." Above: A scene from *THOR #300*, a *"very busy issue."*

title (or perhaps another title altogether) stands an excellent chance of being as uninspiring a story as it was uninspired. A recent example is ***THOR #300,*** which was written for the express and exclusive purpose of explaining the purpose of Jack Kirby's ***ETERNALS*** in the "Marvel Universe."

THOR#300 was written solely to tie up loose threads from the past umpteen years of Marvel Comics. It resolved the judgment of the Fourth Host from ***THE ETERNALS*** book (which had successfully avoided the Marvel Universe"; a shame the "Marvel Universe" did not do likewise), the parentage of Thor, the purpose of the "God Squad," the Destroyer, etc. It also guest-starred every patriarchal pantheon in existence, and killed off the Asgardian gods (for one month). It was a very busy issue. It did many things, but it did ***not*** tell a clear, well-defined, and interesting story. It merely fiddled a bit with the loose ends of other stories.

The case of ***THE ETERNALS*** also brings to mind an instance of "Universe Continuity" 's second problem, namely that the emphasis on fitting everything into one possible framework limits creative attempts in other directions. ***THE ETERNALS*** was an exciting and innovative book. It incorporated several novel techniques for a super-hero series, such as having no one central character, and a multi-focussed plotline. It could conceivably have expanded the perceived creative capabilities of the comics industry. Unfortunately, it met with strong fan resistance—***not*** because of its radical departure from established storytelling techniques, but because Kirby refused to fit it into the "Marvel Universe." It is significant that the one story that used an established Marvel character (issues #14-6, featuring The Hulk—and even there Kirby avoided a direct connection with the "Marvel Universe" by having The Hulk be a robot) was the poorest of the lot. It was the least ingenious and the most dependent on a contrived fight to fill the pages of the book.

The sad failure of ***THE ETERNALS*** is in loathsome contrast to the sales success of DC's Huntress. Her entire ***raison d'etre*** can be summed up in the label "Batman's daughter." The character copies Batman's silhouette and Batman's vow of revenge, but—as with most copies—lacks the aura of originality and real purpose which has been Batman's saving grace for over 40 years. The only explanation of the Huntress' existence is the continuity-mania which rewards formula and penalizes originality.

Continuity, as originally conceived, was a liberating technique which opened new possibilities for comics as a story-telling medium. The modern usage of the word denotes a concept which is strangling the medium, inhibiting creativity, and forcing new comics to feed parasitically on the ideas of the old. ●

Three essays—three very different opinions. Are any of our three Forum paricipants correct, or have all of them overlooked essential information?

If you'd like to voice your opinion on the hows and whys of ***"Continuity in Comic Books,"*** write; ***COMICS FEATURE***/ 31½ Roberts Road #2/Cambridge/MA/ 02138.

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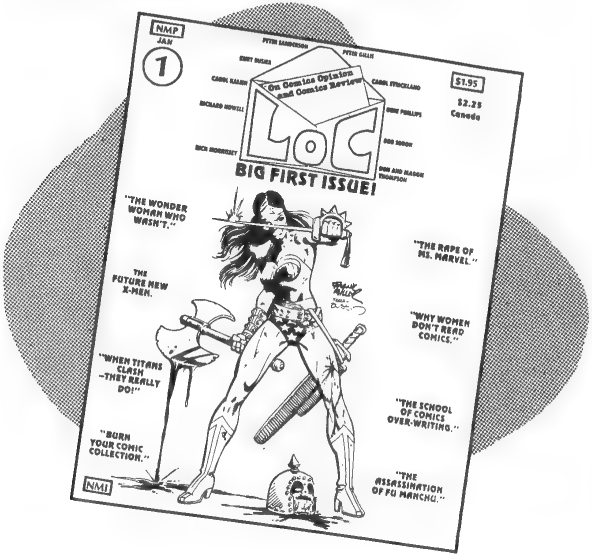

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Fullerton, CA. WEST COAST COMICS CLUB. Meets at Fullerton Science Lecture Hall, #121, California State University, 7:00 p.m. Contact: Barry Short, 420 West 4th Street, San Dimas, CA 91773 (714) 599-2488.

Maplewood, N.J. COMICS CLUB MAPLEWOOD. Meets at 29 Norfolk Avenue, 8:00-9:00 p.m. Contact: Comic Club Maplewood, P.O. Box 65, Maplewood, NJ 07040.

Mt. Prospect, IL. PROSPECT HIGH SCHOOL COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Prospect High School, Room 130, 801 W. Kensington Rd., every Tuesday at 3:00 p.m. Contact: R. Marr.

Nepean, Ontario, Canada. INTERNATIONAL COMIC COLLECTOR'S CLUB. Publishes a quarterly magazine and bulletin. Membership is $10/year. Contact: Ken Gorman or Mike Berthiaume, P.O. Box 11336 Postal Station H, Nepean, Ontario, Canada K2H5Z0.

Phoenix, AZ. PHOENIX COMIC BOOK CLUB. Meets at Quality inn West, 2420 W. Thomas, 11:00 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. Contact: Ken Strack, N. 22nd St., Phoenix, AZ 85018 (602) 992-3323.

Pittsburgh, PA. PITTSBURGH COMIX CLUB. Meets at Eddie's Comix & SF Shop, 11 Federal Street, every second Saturday from 4:00 to 6:00 p.m. Contact: Ben Pondexter, 827 Anaheim, Pittsburgh, PA 15210.

Rochester, NY. COMIC BOOK PEN PAL CLUB. Newsletter published. For info, contact: The Comic Book Man, 135 Glen Ellyn Way, Rochester, NY 14618.

St. Louis, MO. SPECTOR COMICS CLUB. Meets at Century Bowl, 7508 Michigan, 1:00-4:00 p.m. Contact: Anthony Gladish, 3917 Ohio Street, St. Louis, MO 63118.

Urbana, IL. CHAMPAIGN-URBANA COMIC CLUB. Meets at the Illinois Union Building, Room 215, 712 W. Illinois, Urbana, every Thursday at 7:00 p.m. Contact: Mel DeSart.

Vancouver, B.C., Canada. VANCOUVER COMIC BOOK CLUB. Publishes the VCBC Bulletin and sponsors conventions. (V-Con). Contact: VCBC, P.O. Box 48873, Bentall Sta., Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7X1A8.

COMICS CONVENTIONS

Jan. 31. CHARLOTTE MINI-CON. Eastland Mall Community Room, Charlotte, NC.

JAN. 31-Feb.1. CREATION CON IN PHILADELPHIA. The Sheraton Hotel, 1725 Kennedy Blvd. Admission: $5.00 per day or $9.00 for both. Guests: Joe Staton, Len Wein, Marv Wolfman. Films, art display, art contest, costume parade, and auctions.

Jan. 31-Feb 1, FLORIDACON. The Holiday Inn at 1250 W. University Ave, Gainesville, FL. Admission: $4.00 per day or $6.00 for both. Guests: Bob McLeod, Pat Broderick, and George Perez. Films, auction, and costume parade.

Feb. 1. THE LONG ISLAND MONTHLY COMIC BOOK & BASEBALL CARD SHOW. The Coliseum Motor Inn, 1650 Hempstead Tpk, East Meadow, NY. ***Feb. 7. ONCE A MONTH COMIC SHOW.*** Best Western Inn Towne, 300 Broadway, Albany, NY.

Feb. 7-Feb. 8. CREATION CON IN ATLANTA. The Hyatt Regency Hotel in Atlanta, Ga. Admission $5.00 per day or $9.00 for both. Guests: Jim Shooter, Walt Simonson, and Chris Claremont. Films, art display, art contest, costume parade, etc.

Feb. 8. DES MOINES MARKET PLACE. The American Legion Hall at 68th and Douglas in Urbandale, IA. Free.

March 1. THE GREAT AMERICAN CAVALCADE OF COLLECTABLES. The Marriott Hotel at 5257 W. Henrietta Road, Rochester, NY. Admission: $1.50.

March 8. CHICAGO MINI-CON. Pick Congress Hotel at 520 S. Michigan Ave, Chicago IL. Free.

March 14. SPORTS COLLECTORS AND COMIC SHOW. The Bishop Guertin High School in Nashua, NH. Free.

April 11-April 12. MICROCON. The Hotel Leamington in Minneapolis, MN. Guest: John Byrne. Films, auction, and art contest.

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FANDOM ORIGINS PRESENTS:

WHAT NEXT?

by Don and Maggie Thompson

[Note: We are only two of the fans who were active from the earliest days of what is currently comics fandom. There were many big names in those early days—and many little-known people who, nonetheless, devotedly collected comics in the early 1960s. In the interests of presenting as wide-screen a picture as possible of those days, we'd like to invite Fans Who Were There to provide more of the vista. Send letters of information, photos of long-ago events, and the like to us: ***Don and Maggie Thompson, 8786 Hendricks Road, Mentor Ohio 44060.***]

Twenty years ago, comics fandom was forming. No matter how many times we indicate the small focus of its beginnings, today's readers may find the fact hard to believe. We don't know initial circulations of ***XERO*** and ***ALTER EGO*** (two of the first three centers of discussion for comics fandom); however, we once traced the printing history of ***COMIC ART,*** our own comics fanzine. The history was compiled in September 1965, and the researches were as accurate as we could make them at the time.

HARBINGER was the single sheet we used to announce the upcoming publication of ***COMIC ART;*** we had run off 50 copies and mailed them in January 1961. (This may be the place to point out that we always appreciate getting corrections of our errors. It was not until we found this that we recalled that ***HARBINGER*** was mailed in 1961, not in the fall of 1960. Memories were vague, since we had begun planning ***CA*** during Labor Day Weekend 1960.)

Obviously, response to the flyer was overwhelming. Fans rallied to the cause of a fanzine devoted to comics art, as you can tell from the circulation of our first issue in April 1961. We had a print run of 75.

A discussion of that issue may give you a picture of how comics fandom was set up in those days. First of all, ***COMIC ART #1*** (like ***XERO #1***) was mimeographed. (***ALTER EGO #1*** was run off on a spirit duplicator.) ***CA #1*** was almost as much of a sighting shot as ***HARBINGER*** had been. ***CA*** was published "on a very irregular schedule," and #1 was free. (#2 would be 20¢ or free for contributions, trades, and the like.) There was only one formal "article," a discussion by Dick Lupoff of the starting of comics fandom as he saw it.

The big feature of interest to many of those 70 readers (we kept five file copies) was the first fan-press printing of the full text of the Code of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc. It's the sort of thing that is considered almost routine today, but it was quite an eye-opener then, somthing few fans had seen. (Especially of interest was "General Standards Part C: All elements or techniques not specifically mentioned herein, but which are contrary to the spirit and intent of the Code, are considered violations of good taste or decency, shall be prohibited.")

Of more interest to today's readers may be Dick Lupoff's article, ***"Re-Birth."*** He commented on what was, he felt a burgeoning interest in comics. By this point, ***XERO #2*** had been published—with ***"The Spawn of M. C. Gaines"*** by Ted White. It was an 11-page piece devoted to DC, which ended with a commentary on what had happened in the most recent years. ***FLASH, GREEN LANTERN,*** and the ***JLA*** had been revived. ***Hawkman*** was scheduled for revival. Ted's last paragraph read:

"Beyond that? 'The Green Arrow', once the star of ***MORE FUN*** but for years since a subsidiary, is scheduled to try out in ***SHOWCASE.*** I think he'll make it. I think kids are ready for him and his fellows. I think they'll be happy with a new era of super-heroes like the one twenty years ago. I know that their grown-up and nostalgic brothers will be happy. And maybe it'll make the despondent publishers happy too. Maybe this [will be] the shot in the arm that will save the comics industry. And as an old ***ALL-STAR COMICS*** fan, I'll crow and say 'I told you so!' "

Dick, commenting on what he had experienced as a result of publishing his own article on Captain Marvel and Ted's article on DC, wrote:

" ***'ALL IN COLOR'*** has been the most letter-provoking feature of ***XERO;*** numerous people have requested copies, specifying that their motive is to obtain the comics articles, and if all the authors currently committed to write for the series come through with articles, the series will run well into 1962 before material runs out—at the present rate of publication...All of this means something, and unless I'm one very lousy inducer, it means that there is a great amount of interest in comic books, that it has been rolling along, usually unpublicized, showing through only occasionally in science fiction fandom and other peripheral areas of activity."

We managed to get out another issue of ***COMIC ART*** in 1961. This time, our print run was 125 copies, and it was August.

By this time, four issues of ***XERO*** and two issues of ***ALTER EGO*** had been published. This time, we had two articles (one by Dick Lupoff on costumed heroes without super-powers and super-powered heroes without costumes; one by Buck Coulson generally making fun of the whole idea of comics fandom, wondering why there wasn't a similar fondness for ***"Dick and Jane"*** primers, since "they are on the same literary level."). But our letter column had started to show what marvelous people had things to say about comics and the idea of a comics fandom.

Crockett Johnson (creator of ***BARNABY*** and ***HAROLD AND THE PURPLE CRAYON***) said, "I gag a bit at the word 'fanzine' and question its intelligibility and value." Carl Barks said, "I remember [Walt Kelly] as a thin kid whose running chatter on any subject was like a drumfire of Pogoisms." Steve Stiles commented that ***CRIME AND PUNISHMENT*** wouldn't survive the Comics Code. Harvey Kurtzman

said he was getting some ***SPIRITs*** "to run in the upcoming ***HELP!.***" Jerry De Fuccio wrote, "incidentally, I have the very first drawing of Superman by Siegel and Shuster as conceived in their Cleveland High School days. They titled it 'The Superman' in 1925. I also have a very rough layout the boys conceived in 1936 when they were trying to peddle the idea. It bears a few rough pencil sketches of the character and bills him as the 'greatest adventure/humor strip of the Age.' But get this: in the background they display the marketing value of this character. They show him on cornflakes boxes and T-shirts!"

You get the idea.

There was an outpouring of comments and enthusiasm and readiness to give personal views and anecdotes to enrich the experiences of those few other devotees to an artform in danger.

In fact, by the end of 1961, there were enough fans that those seminal fans, Jerry Bails and Roy Thomas, founded a group called The Academy of Comic-Book Arts and Sciences. Roy Thomas established the Alley Awards and tallied the ballots.

What on earth were the Alley Awards? Well, since he was a comic-strip caveman, it could be argued that Alley Oop was the first super-hero. Get it? The first Alley Awards (for 1961) were given to favorites in the comic-book field. Nominating ballots were sent to twenty people, who thus became the first Board of Directors of The Academy. They were: Jerry Bails, Bob Barron, Len Brown, Dale Christman, Wendell Davis, Richard Durrell, Donald Foote, Ronn Foss, Irving Glassman, Ron Haydock, Howard Keltner, Ed Lahmann, Dick Lupoff, Douglas Marden, Raymond Miller, Fred Norwood, Frank Nuessel, Roy Thomas, Don Thompson, and Bill White.

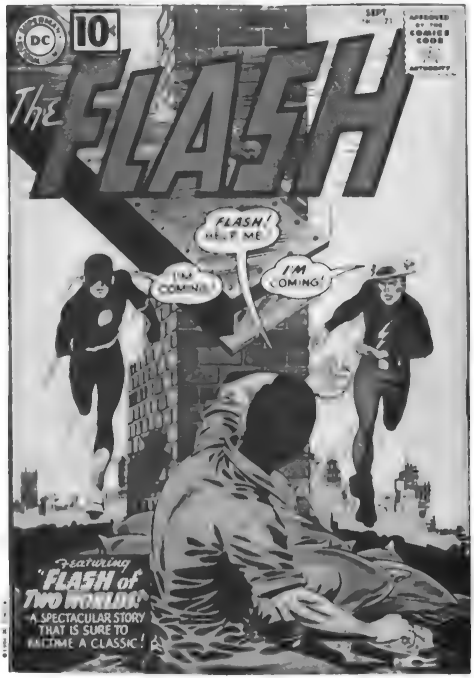
(You may note that there are no women listed, despite Pat Lupoff's and Maggie Curtis [later Maggie Thompson]'s activities in the field. Though there were other women who read and collected comics, they were not very much in evidence in comics fandom then. In fact, Paul Krassner asked Maggie about that at John Benson's NYC comicon—but we're getting ahead of ourselves.)

The Board of Directors nominated favorites in listed categories, and the final ballot was sent to more than 750 active fans. Roy told us that fewer than 200 ballots were returned. The results were printed in ***ALTER EGO #4*** (Fall 1962) and provide an interesting view of comic book favorites of the earliest organized comics fandom:

FLASH #123 was the big winner in the first Alley Awards

1. Best Regularly Published Comic Book: ***JUSTICE LEAGUE***
2. Best Adventure Hero/ine Having Own Comic Book: ***Green Lantern***
3. Best Adventure Hero/ine Not Having Own Comic Book: ***Hawkman***
4. Best Supporting Character: ***Elongated Man***
5. Best Cover: ***FLASH #123 ("Flash of Two Worlds")***
6. Best Single Issue of a Comic Book: ***FLASH #123 ("Flash of Two Worlds")***
7. Best Artist: ***Carmine Infantino***
8. Best Story: ***"Flash of Two Worlds"***
9. Best Adventure-Hero Group: ***The Justice League of America***
10. Hero/ine Most Worthy of Revival: ***The Spectre***

Special Division: Worst Comic-Book Currently Published: ***WONDER WOMAN***



Fandom Zone

APPROVED BY THE COMICS CODE
AUTHORITY
THE SEAL OF APPROVAL appears only on comic magazines which have been carefully reviewed, prior to publication, by the Comics Code Authority — an agency operating apart from any individual publisher, exercising independent judgment — and found to have met the high standards of morality required by the code of the Comics Magazine Association of America, Inc.

You'll recall that, then the Alleys were first voted on, only one Marvel Comic of the so-called Silver Age had been published. It was ***FANTASTIC FOUR #1***.

It may seem hard to credit, when you look at Overstreet's tenth ***COMIC BOOK PRICE GUIDE*** and see ***FANTASTIC FOUR #1*** listed at $1,000 in mint condition. But we must assure you that, when it came out, that issue was not any great shakes. We panned it (along with ***THE ATOM)*** in ***COMIC ART #2***; people who ignored us and bought it and packed it carefully away then are doubtless gloating now. (Actually, we did suggest to a dealer friend at the time that ***FF #1*** was going to be worth something someday. His response was, "Naw, none o' this new stuff will ever be worth anything." We are charitable souls; we remind him of this only rarely.) At any rate, the artistic quality of ***FF #1*** may explain its absence from the roster of fan favorites in that first Alley Poll.

You may notice something else about this voting. Your first clue would have been the name of the awards, and your second clue could have been the fans behind the Academy. The majority of the comics fans was not the SF fans who were also interested in comics art. It was not the critics of political cartoons, animated cartoons, strips, funny animals, satire, and the like. It was, by and large, fans of comic-book super-heroes. Or, as Jerry Bails once said to us, "If the character has a mask and a cape, then I'm interested."

Carl Barks' work wasn't recognized throughout comics fandom then, although it was still being published. Comic strips were ignored by virtue of the very title of the Academy. Nor was this some sort of strange skewing done strictly by those setting up the Alley Awards. It was the thrust of comics fandom in its infancy; it was comic-book super-hero fandom. ●

NEXT MONTH:

THE MARVEL AGE OF COMICS

NEXT ISSUE

An Interview with the ***UPSTART STUDIO:***

Howard Chaykin, Walt Simonson, Frank Miller, and James Sherman

Our special "birthday" salute to ***CAPTAIN AMERICA***

Including the inside story of his origin: A talk with ***Joe Simon***

Plus: A *COMICS FEATURE* exclusive: Unpublished ***CAPTAIN AMERICA*** Artwork

by JOHN BYRNE

The Super-Team Spirit

THE MARVEL FAMILY and the FAWCETT HEROES

The Lost Comics Companies investigates

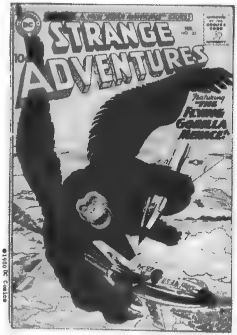
CRASH COMICS

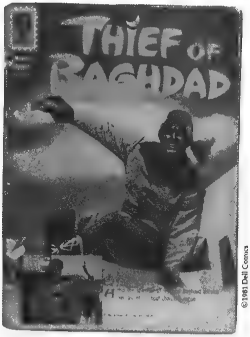
Plus The Fandom Zone, Headlines, End Notes, and more.

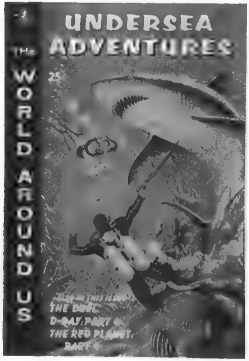
DON'T MISS COMICS FEATURE #10

On sale in late February

20 Years Ago this Month







4 NEW APPROACHES TO COMMENTARY

COMICS FEATURE

If you read comics because you *like* them, then we're the magazine for you. We have the interviews you want with the writers and artists you most want to know about (creators like Steve Englehart, Jim Starlin, Len Wein, Val Mayerik, Leonard Starr, Boris Vallejo, David Michelinie, Archie Goodwin, Roy Thomas, and More!). We have the coverage on all the companies that lets you be as familiar with current happenings as you want to be. We have witty *and* informative articles that focus on both the history of comics and the current development of the industry. We bring you everything you're looking for, plus we share your love of comics. How can you lose? Pick up a copy of *COMICS FEATURE* and share *our* positive attitude towards comics!!!

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LOC

On Comics Opinion and Comics Review

People complain a lot about how good fanzines were in the "good old days". Those were the days when fans could write articles that really *commented* on comics,. that raised questions about their creation and their development that other fans were interested in reading. The days when fans used to care about communicating with *other comic fans*?

Well, those days are here again. Now there's *LOC—On Comics Commentary and Comics Review* — loaded with columns by fans with things to say about comics and why they love them. Fans like Don and Maggie Thompson, Peter Sanderson, Peter Gillis, Carol Kalish, Richard Howell, and Margaret O'Connell...fans like *YOU!*

LOC's got it all. You can get it all, too, by picking up a copy of *LOC*. First issue available this November. Watch for it. $1.95 each or twelve issues for $15.00!!

NMP

THE ONLY THREE LETTERS YOU NEED TO KNOW

Art FORM

QUARTERLY ON SEQUENTIAL ART

ART FORM is for readers who like to *think* about comics, who dream about how they can evolve into a truly special art form in their own right, who love Herriman's *KRAZY KAT*, Steve Englehart's *DETECTIVE COMICS* series, or Carl Barks' Ducks! We cover the past, the present, and the future of the industry, but we do it with a special twist. Each issue poses a question and asks the major scholars currently working in comics research to help us answer it. *You* get perceptive, definative articles on thought-provoking questions. The first quarterly issue, out this Winter, raises and answers the question "Can Comics be ART?" Join us for this first important issue and you too can be part of the debate.

BRUSH STROKES

Your school doesn't offer you courses on comic art. Your art teacher looks at you kind of funny when you ask how to draw story continuity. Don't abandon your hopes for an art career in comics—read *BRUSH STROKES*, the magazine that will answer all your questions about comics art! Interviews with major artists focusing on their *art*, their *training*, and their *techniques*, tips on style and artistic shortcuts, columns on pacing and story-telling tricks—all these and more will be in every issue. Plus a special section in which a comics pro *evaluates work submitted by you, the readers!* We can't promise you that reading *BRUSH STROKES* will pave your way to a career as a comics professional, but it will certainly remove the boulders from your path! Coming this March—look for it!!

ORDER ANY OF THESE MAGAZINES FROM: NEW MEDIA PUBLISHING 12345 STARKEY LARGO FLA 33515

MARVEL COMICS COMING ATTRACTIONS

The following comics bear a *June* cover date

Shipping February 3, 1981 On sale February 24, 1981

MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE #76 — Written by TOM DeFALCO Art by JERRY BINGHAM and CHIC STONE. Guest-stars Giant-Man and Ieeman join the ever-lovin' blue-eyed Thing to thwart the Ringmaster's ultimate scheme! And we do mean *ultimate!*

KING CONAN #6 - Written by ROY THOMAS Art by JOHN BUSCEMA and ERNIE CHAN. Though the years have mellowed him, the Cimmerian's battle skills have remained undiminished— and a good thing too, for he'll need them all as he stalks the evil sorcerer, Yan Cheng, abductor of his queen, Zenobia!

STAR TREK #15 - The stars beckon, the planets call, and a small, dedicated crew of adventurers answers. Join Spock, Kirk and the rest of the Enterprise crew as they probe yet deeper into the mysteries of 23rd Century space.

DAREDEVIL #171 - Written and penciled by FRANK MILLER Inked by KLAUS JANSON. While Daredevil and the Kingpin battle to the death, Bullseye stalks them both!

MARVEL SUPER HEROES #98 - Originally presented in Incredible Hulk #149. Story by GOODWIN with art by TRIMPE and J. SEVERIN. The strange secret of the Inhertor from beyond Plus, another vintage Marvel super hero spoof

DAZZLER #4 — Written by TOM DeFALCO. If you're wondering how Dazz is gonna survive her final battle with Dr. Doom— so is she! Be here and you'll both find out

KA-ZAR #3 - Written by BRUCE JONES. Art by BRENT ANDERSON and CARLOS GARZON The lord of the hidden jungle, torn between his instincts and his intellect, explores the mysteries of the newly-discovered Savage World, aided and abetted by Zabu, Shanna, and Leanne. Join them for the most amazing adventures yet!

SPIDER-WOMAN #39 - Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT Pencils by STEVE LEIALOHA For her first case in her new career as a private eye, Spider-Woman is given the toughest assignment of all: find out what happened to **Ms. Marvel!** And to make things even tougher, she's got to take on the awesome might of the assembled Avengers to do it!

Shipping February 10, 1981/On sale March 3, 1981

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #217 - Written by DENNIS O'NEIL Art by JOHN ROMITA, JR and JIM MOONEY East side, west side, all around the town — the Web-Slinger runs into more turmoil and trouble than even *he's* used to. Be here!

CAPTAIN AMERICA #258 - Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT Art by BILL SIENKIEWICZ and JOE SINNOTT In Brooklyn Heights— his home turf— the star-spangled Avenger must save his neighbors from the super-powered arsonist called *Blockbuster!*

THOR #308 - Written by DOUG MOENCH Art by KEITH POLLARD and CHIC STONE Loki and Karnilla unleash a Snow Giant attack on Manhattan!

MICRONAUTS #30 - Written by BILL MANTLO Art by PAT BRODERICK and DANNY BULANADI If the Micronauts cannot revive the Enigma Force, the Microverse will *die* and their victory over Baron Karza will be hollow indeed!

GHOST RIDER #57 - Written by MICHAEL FLEISHER Art by DON PERLIN Introducing the ghostly terror of the Apparition!

SAVAGE SHE-HULK #17 — Written by DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT Art by MIKE VOSBURG and FRANK SPRINGER Who's big, strong, wrinkled, grey and smells like peanuts? The Man-Elephant, that's who! But the She-Hulk won't be laughing when this new menace challenges her to a duel to the death!

MOON KNIGHT #8 — Written by DOUG MOENCH Art by BILL SIENKIEWICZ and KLAUS JANSON The entire population of New York goes mad and Moon Knight travels to the moon in a story called, appropriately, enough, "Moon Knight"! Sounds weird? You bet!

DR. STRANGE #47 - Written by ROGER STERN. Pencils by GENE COLAN. All of Stephen Strange's mystical powers are as naught against Ikonn, the living personification of illusion!

Shipping February 17, 1981
On sale March 10, 1981

INCREDIBLE HULK #260 - Written by BILL MANTLO Art by SAL BUSCEMA It's final showdown time for the green Golem and Glenn Talbot as the mad major's War Wagon tracks the Hulk to the raging top of an ancient Japanese volcano

CONAN #123 - Written by J M. DeMATTEIS Pencils by JOHN BUSCEMA From across the dimensional gulfs come the Witches of Nexx, crying out for the souls of Dukenfia and Jonnwalli! And to save his allies, the Cimmerian must journey through time itself to the decadent, death-dealing Rome of *Caligula!*

MARVEL TALES #128 — Reprinting Spider-Man #151, written by WEIN with art by ANDRU and ROMITA. He's back for more the Shocker! Plus, from Thor #152, more *Origins of the Inhumans* by LEE, KIRBY, and SINNOTT

X-MEN #146 - Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT Pencils by DAVE COCKRUM While the new X-MEN fight for their lives against Dr. Doom's deathtraps, the old X-MEN brave the terrors of Murderworld to free their imprisoned loved ones. Needless to say, both teams are in *big* trouble!

AVENGERS #208 - Plot by BOB BUDIANSKY. Script by BUDIANSKY and DANNY FINGEROTH. Art by GENE COLAN and DAN GREEN. Throughout the ages across the galaxies there has reigned the terror of the eternal warrior called the *Berserker*! Now he threatens our world and our time and even the Avengers don't know how to stop him!

ROM #19 — Written by BILL MANTLO. Art by SAL BUSCEMA. The Spaceknight is trapped— without his equitalizer— in Limbo, where he encounters his old enemies (the Wraiths and Karas) and a new one (old-time Marvel fave-rave baddie, the Space Phantom) and learns, to his eternal regret, that in Limbo you can die again and again and again and again *forever*!

POWER-MAN/IRON FIST #78 — Written by MARY JO DUFFY. Art by KERRY GAMMILL and RICARDO VILLAMONTE. Cage and the Fist go to sunny Florida to ferret out some shady drug smugglers!

Shipping February 24, 1981
On sale March 17 1981

FANTASTIC FOUR #231 - Written by DOUG MOENCH. Art by BILL SIENKIEWICZ and JOE SINNOTT. The FF and their Baxter Building HQ are trapped in the negative Zone at the mercy of Stygiax, while the building's earth-space is replaced by a part of the Zone itself!

MARVEL TEAM-UP #106 - Written by TOM DeFALCO. Art by HERB TRIMPE and MIKE ESPOSITO. Cover penciled by FRANK MILLER. Together for the first time the Amazing Spider-Man and the Savage She-Hulk! It's mighty Marvel chemistry at its best!

IRON MAN #147 - Written by DAVID MICHELINIE. Art by JOHN ROMITA JR and BOB LAYTON. Cover by BOB LAYTON. In the past the stunning conclusion to Iron Man's never-before-told first adventure. In the present: The Golden Avenger must save Stark International from burning to the ground. And— finally— the secret of Vic Martinelli!

PETER PARKER #55 - Written by ROGER STERN. Art by LUKE McDONNELL and JIM MOONEY. Cover penciled by FRANK MILLER. Spidey takes on Nitro, the Exploding Man in the tale we had to call, "The Big Blowout!"

DEFENDERS #96 - Written by J. M. DeMATTEIS. The Defenders and guest-star Ghost Rider, battle the demon coalition of the Six-Fingered Hand!

MARVEL SUPER ACTION #32 — Reprints Avengers #71, written by THOMAS with art by S. BUSCEMA and GRAINGER. The Black Knight steps in to give the Avengers a hand in their hopeless battle against the Grand-Master and Kang. Plus another adventure of Marvel London's IncredibleHulk.

STAR WARS #48 - Written by LARRY HAMA. Art by CARMINE INFANTINO and CARLOS GARZON. On the planet Aargau, Princess Lela and Darth Vader play a sinister game of power, propaganda and death!

MASTER OF KUNG FU #101 - Plot by DOUG MOENCH and MIKE ZECK. Script by MOENCH. Art by ZECK and GENE DAY. The staggering sequel to the classic MOKF tale, "Smoke, Beads, and Blood!", in which Shang Chi must make the agonizing choice between justice and revenge!

SGT. FURY #164 - Reprinting Sgt. Fury #70, written by G. FRIEDRICH with art by AYERS and J. SEVERIN. Enter The Missouri Marauders! Plus, from Not Brand Echh #2, more adventures of Knock Furious and his Agents of SHEESH by FRIEDRICH and MARIE SEVERIN.

WHAT IF #27 — Written by MARY JO DUFFY. Pencils by JERRY BINGHAM. X-MEN #137 — "Phoenix Must Die!" — was one of Marvel's most controversial stories ever. Here we present an alternate reality's conclusion to that shocker. *"What If Phoenix Had Lived?"*

MARVEL MAGAZINES

Shipping February 10, 1981 On sale March 3, 1981

CRAZY #74 - Cover by BOB LARKIN. Winter got ya down? Well, here comes Crazy to remind you that things are even worse than you thought! We've got "The Finger Family Goes to Divorce Court," by DAN GUTMAN; a "GLORIA" spoof by PAUL KUPPERBERG and BOB CAMP, plus all sorts of funny stuff by NOEL BAEBLER, FRANK SPRINGER, STEVE MELLOR, ARNOLDO FRANCHIONI, BILL GARNIN, LITTLE MOON, JIM OWSLEY, MARIE SEVERIN, VIRGIL DIAMOND, ALAN KUPPERBERG, STEVE SKEATES, PAT BRODERICK, ARMONDO GIL, DAVID ALLIKAS, DAVE MORRIS, KOVACS, and NED SONNTAG. At least you'll have a few laughs before you kill yourself. (Cover dated May)

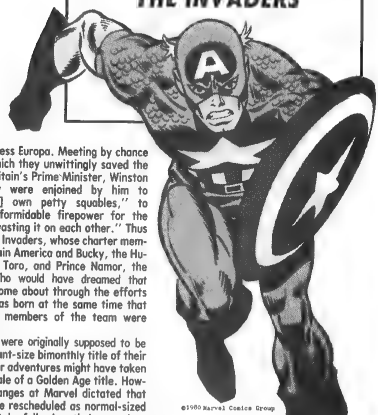
SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #64 - Written by MICHAEL FLEISHER. Pencils by JOHN BUSCEMA. Drama drenched derring-do in the Hyborean age, featuring the most savage Barbarian of them all! (Cover dated May)

MARVEL PREMIERE #60
Written by MILLS and WAGNER
Art by DAVE GIBBONS
Cover by GENE DAY
The weird (what else?) conclusion to Dr. Who's adventure in the *"City of the Damned!"*

While we never knowingly print character adventures in these pages, Marvel Comics reserves the right to make any changes which may become necessary. We regret that the advertising that appears in the Marvel Bullpen

THE SUPER-TEAM SPIRIT

A LOOK AT MARVEL'S *THE INVADERS*



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PART II

by Murray R. Ward

I. ORIGINS

All super-teams, just as all comic series, have two origin stories. One is the story of how the group was formed, or of how the hero came to be; the other is the sometimes less glamorous but no less interesting story of how the creators arrived at the genesis of the comics series. In more modern times, for example, we have both the tale of the fateful rocket trip that formed the Fantastic Four, and the story of how Stan Lee and Jack Kirby combined to create the first team of 60s Marvel stars.

The origin of the 1940's Marvel teams is no exception. Having learned that, in fact, there were indeed other teams active during the war years in the Marvel Universe, we must learn both the story of how they originated and why these adventures had not been told before, and the tale of how they came to be chronicled during the 1970s, generations after they actually "happened." Being for the most part wartime adventures, it is easy to determine the source of the secrecy surrounding these untold tales: they were simply suppressed as a matter of Allied security "for the duration," as the saying went. So well hidden were these records, that like those regarding the creation of Capt. America by American scientists, they remained buried in the files for long after the need for such security was past. We may never know what dedicated researcher dug them out and released them to the public on Marvel-Earth, but in our world, the man responsible was Roy Thomas. With the creation in 1975 of The Invaders, Roy began one of two series which came to be known as "continuity implants" (the other being issues **#1-9** of ***RAMPAGING HULK*** magazine), that is, series which purported to tell those stories of an earlier era which had not been published at the time in comics. With the Hulk magazine, it was the early 1960s and those months between the last issue of the Green Goliath's first short-lived series and the beginning of his strip in ***TALES TO ASTONISH***, with the Invaders, it was the wartime cases of the ***united*** super-powered champions of the day.

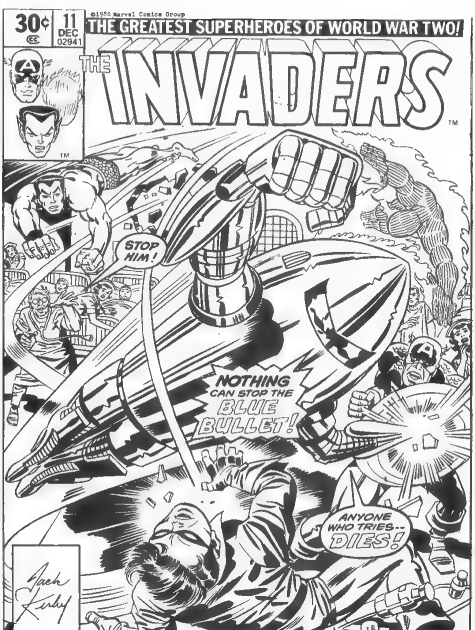
The Invaders combined the "Big Three" among the Timely heroes, together with their boy partners, as a five-man squad whose aim was to "invade" Adolf Hitler's supposedly impregnable Fortress Europa. Meeting by chance on a case in which they unwittingly saved the life of Great Britain's Prime Minister, Winston Churchill, they were enjoined by him to "shelve [their] own petty squabbles," to "save [their] formidable firepower for the Axis and stop wasting it on each other." Thus was formed the Invaders, whose charter members were Captain America and Bucky, the Human Torch and Toro, and Prince Namor, the Sub-Mariner. Who would have dreamed that all this would come about through the efforts of a fan who was born at the same time that the super-hero members of the team were first created?

The Invaders were originally supposed to be featured in a giant-size bimonthly title of their own, where their adventures might have taken on the grand scale of a Golden Age title. However, policy changes at Marvel dictated that all such titles be rescheduled as normal-sized series immediately following their creation. Thus it was that the new/old team of heroes went from a giant bimonthly to a regular-sized monthly (a fate that also overtook the New X-Men) and had two "first" issues which came out within months of each other, ***GIANT-SIZE INVADERS #1*** and ***INVADERS #1***. Strange publishing practices seem to dog the Golden Age heroes' footsteps.

Whatever their format, the group met with sales success, and prompted writer/editor Thomas to dig the other, less famous Timely characters out of mothballs. The Invaders would meet, and learn of, several other super-teams in the course of their 41-issue span, all of them champions of bygone eras and all of them never having been suspected to exist until the 1970s.

In a four-part story, which see-sawed back and forth between the pages of ***INVADERS*** and Marvel's tryout title, ***MARVEL PREMIERE***, our heroes were responsible for the creation of a second wartime group, the Liberty Legion. As the Invaders were billed as "America's Greatest Super-Heroes of World War II" and fought most of their missions abroad, many times behind enemy lines, the "lesser" heroes of the Liberty Legion were given the masthead "America's ***Homefront*** Heroes of WW II" and dedicated themselves for the most part to more domestic struggles. When the Invaders themselves were captured and turned into mind-controlled pawns of the Red Skull, their lone surviving free member, Bucky, called together several of the other costumed battlers of note and formed a second-string group to battle his erstwhile friends and bring them to their senses. The Legion consisted of the Patriot, Miss America, the Whizzer, the Red Raven, the Thin Man, Jack Frost, and the Blue Diamond, and although they were never to graduate beyond guest-star status to a series of their own, in many ways they were more exciting to readers than the more-famous Invaders.

The problem with the ***INVADERS*** series was its very selling point: nostalgia. While it was fun to create and read a 1940s-style comic



in the 1970s, the continuity dictated that the series lack somewhat in the element of suspense. Just as at DC, where Jim Shooter's famous "Adult Legion" story had charted an unalterable course for future stories of the ***LEGION OF SUPER-HEROES*** by showing the eventual destinies of many of the team's members, so were the Invaders locked on course by virtue of the earlier-told, later-happening stories of the characters who made up the group. Readers of ***THE AVENGERS #4*** knew that Bucky was fated to die in 1945, just as those who had read ***SUB-MARINER #14*** (1960s series) were aware that Toro would survive until 1969, then perish. Captain America, we all knew, would be frozen in a glacier for some 19 years after the war, and emerge to join the Avengers and resume his career. Sub-Mariner would eventually contract amnesia, regaining his memory in 1962 in ***FANTASTIC FOUR #4***. And the strangest fate of all would overtake the Human Torch, as that misnamed android hero would "die" not once, but several times, only to be reborn again, and at last to become the Avenger called the Vision. In the interim, another hero, Johnny Storm of the Fantastic Four, would take over his name and flaming powers. One method in which Thomas dealt with this dilemma was to introduce new members to the group, entirely unheard-of characters whose future fates we did not know. One of these was the British crusader called Union Jack (in two incarnations, father and son) and another was his daughter/sister, Spitfire. What happened to these characters after the war was not revealed until ***CAPTAIN AMERICA #253***, long after the Invaders series had run its course.

This then was what made the Liberty Legion a breath of fresh air upon the 1940s-as-seen-from-the-1970s scene. Again, the characters, although they had previously appeared in the Golden Age, rather than being created out of whole cloth like Union Jack and Spitfire, were not known to have survived to the present. Anything could happen to them—they could be wounded, quit the team, or even die in action! There were two exceptions to the rule: we knew that the Whizzer and Miss America would survive the war and join with the erstwhile Invaders to form the All-Winners Squad; and we also knew from ***GIANT-SIZE AVENGERS #1*** that the two would eventually marry and retire, Miss America dying in childbirth and the Whizzer living on to the present. As to the others, we had met Red Raven as a guest-star in both ***X-MEN*** and ***SUB-MARINER***, so his survival was assured, although his course was by no means as well charted as those of his fellow heroes. ***WHAT IF? #4*** would finally set up the Patriot as a replacement for the refrigerated Captain America, but as to the Thin Man, Blue Diamond, and Jack Frost, their stories have yet to be told.

A third team of the past, though not of the 1940s, was created in the stories which added Union Jack and Spitfire to the Invaders legend. Union Jack was originally a hero of the first World War, who came out of retirement briefly to join the Invaders, and was later replaced by his son wearing the same costume. But Marvel already had another crusader based in that still earlier era, a heroic flier called the Phantom Eagle, who had made two brief appearances in flashback strips in the late 1960s. These two, it was revealed, together with the French-born swordsman called the Crimson Cavalier and the British gladiators known as Sir Steel and the Silver Squire, formed a team given the name Freedom's Five. No stories of the group beyond the acknowledgement of their existence in ***INVADERS #7*** have ever appeared, although Lord Falsworth (the first Union Jack) therein declared that "all the men I knew then—on both sides—[are] all gone now." The passing of the Phantom Eagle had been noted in a flashback tale, and although the elder Falsworth turns up still among the living in ***CAPTAIN AMERICA #253***, we may presume the three other members of comics' only WW I team to be no more.

Yet another team sprung from the pages of the Invaders, albeit a short-lived one, and one with a unique real-world origin. At the same time that Marvel was publishing the adventures of their WW II-based heroes, DC had launched a title featuring the old Quality Comics characters of the 40s whose publishing

rights they now held, and had grouped them under the banner of the Freedom Fighters. Rather than following the Marvel lead and restoring the sextet of Uncle Sam, Doll Man, the Ray, Black Condor, Phantom Lady, and the Human Bomb to their original era, DC elected to relate instead their present-day adventures. Nevertheless, the similarities between the two teams were obvious, so a guest-star story of sorts pointing up the common elements was planned. Each company created a new group of heroes called the Crusaders to be pitted against the existing team, but DC's Crusaders were given the abilities of the Invaders, while Marvel's Crusaders were cast in the image of the Freedom Fighters, thus satisfying the fans' urge to see the equivalent of a battle between the two companies' teams. (The Freedom Fighters will be covered in depth in a later article in this series.) For the record, the Crusaders who fought both with and against the Invaders included the Spirit of '76, Dyna-Mite, Tommy Lightning, Captain Wings, Ghost Girl, and Thunderfist. And again, two members went on to other endeavors after the disbanding of the alliance in ***INVADERS #14-15***. Dyna-Mite, once again a full-sized rather than diminutive warrior, became the Mighty Destroyer when the original hero of that name assumed his father's mantle as the second Union Jack; the Spirit of '76, like the Patriot, served as a Captain America replacement in ***WHAT IF? #4***, the "untold" second All-Winners case.

One more team was to originate out of the Invaders stories before that series came to an end. Fashioned after the earlier Young Allies, who were essentially a kid gang led by super-sidekicks Bucky and Toro, the Kid Commandos made their debut after a complicated series of adventures involving a Japanese-American

CHARGE! CAP! HAVE WE FOUR CAN MARCH AMERICA OUP IN A COUPLE OF WKS. AT LEAST, WE GOTTA TRY!!
WE'VE EVEN GOT A NAME FOR OUR SELVES--THE KID COMMAN-DOS!
I'M GLAD, CAPTAIN AMERICA, THAT YOU AND THE TORCH DON'T MIND LOSING THE BOYS FOR A WHILE.
I'M SURE MOTHER TORCH DON'T MIND AT ALL!
LOSING THEM, GHENNY LOU? ON THE CONTINENT?
YOU KIDS--ALL YOUNGSTERS--ARE THE HOPE OF THE FUTURE --AMERICA'S, AND THE WORLD'S!
AND, YOU KNOW... I'M STARTING TO GET DOWNRIGHT OPTIMISTIC...!
©1980 Marvel Comics Group

The official birth of the Kid Commandos

internment camp in ***INVADERS #28***. The two new members were the Human Top, one of the Golden Age Timely characters of that name (to say nothing of the 1960s villain who later became the Whirlwind), and Golden Girl, also the second of that cognomen, the other being a late-1940s hanger-on in Captain America's strip. The Kid Commandos are thus the earliest (in terms of story era) inter-racial super-hero team, not counting the non-super-powered Blackhawks, since the young Human Top is black, while Golden Girl is an Oriental. Like the majority of the other "new" 1940s characters, the present whereabouts of these once-teenaged crusaders in unknown. As their new adult allies added to the suspense of the Invaders lineup, so did these two new teammates interact well with the foredoomed Bucky and Toro. The Human Top also functioned to erase the stigma created by the Young Allies' one black member, a stereotyped comic-relief character called Whitewash Jones. (Again, for the record, the other Allies were Knuckles O'Toole, Jeff Sandervilt, and Tubby Tinkle. It wasn't until the 1960s that "a chicken in every pot" became "a girl in every group.")

II. ORGANIZATION

Unlike the JSA and the Marvel Family with their formal meeting rooms, and the even more elaborate secret headquarters of the 1960s and 1970s groups, the Invaders and their eventual spin-off groups met wherever and whenever necessary to plan battle strategy and sally forth on missions. After all, more than the other 1940s teams, they were formed solely in aid of the war effort, at Churchill's express request. The Justice Society rechristened itself the Justice Battalion at the height of the global conflict, but continued as a crime-fighting club during and after the war. The Invaders, however, as their name implied, were brought together for and by World War II. The Sub-Mariner's personal amphibian aircraft, the flagship of the Atlantean war fleet, became their world-traveling equivalent of the Fantastic Four's Pogo Plane, and they eventually picked up a regular government liaison team of agents and a secret rendezvous point with them, but as to regular HQ and scheduled meetings, there was no time for anything so formal or organized. After all, there were Nazis to smash, and only 3½ years (after the team's formation, two weeks after Pearl Harbor) to smash them! The other super-teams planned on surviving the war; the Invaders, with their three-decades-later viewpoint, knew they wouldn't.

The Liberty Legion would eventually loan two of its members to the Invaders while Union Jack and Spitfire (who had replaced Bucky and Toro when they left to form the Kid Commandos) departed on a separate mission. Thus, the Whizzer and Miss America were members of the group when the series finally ended after 41 issues, one giant-size origin tale, and one annual (plus a guest appearance in an ***FF ANNUAL***, and an inter-connected Legion guest-shot in ***MARVEL TWO-IN-ONE ANNUAL #1***), and thus they learned together with the other, charter members, of the apparent

After a long trial by fire, the Liberty Legion is endorsed by The Invaders

...I'M BETTING THEY'LL BE GLAD TO HAVE THE INVADERS BEARING DOWN ON THE AXIS HORDES IN EUROPE, AND THE LIBERTY LEGION PROTECTING THE HOME FRONT...
CHUCK! WE'RE NOT LETTING DOWN OUR GUARD AGAIN, NOT ANY OF US...
...TILL EVERY ARMY AND CREW LEARN THAT, WHEN THEY TACKLE ONE ARMY, THEY BIT OFF MORE THAN THE THIRD REICH CAN CHEW!
FOR THE DURATION!
AMEN TO THAT!
AND GO SAY WE ARE!
WANT TO SEE MORE OF THE SUPER-HEROES OF WORLD WAR II? THEN BE SURE TO FOLLOW THE EXPLOITS OF THESE GREAT HEROES AND BUY A BOND FOR BRAVE'S SAKE!
©1980 Marvel Comics Group

demise of two of their members in ***WHAT IF? #4***. Although the ***WHAT IF?*** series normally devotes itself to tales of alternate worlds and might-have-been scenarios involving the familiar Marvel characters, the fourth issue is unique in that it relates a "true" tale of the mainstream Marvel Universe. Here we see the Invaders, in 1945, learning of the now-infamous case in the course of which the original Captain America and Bucky passed from the scene. This issue also recounts the "missing" case of the All-Winners Squad from the nonexistent ***ALL-WINNERS #20***, and tells the story of how the once-Invaders renamed their alliance for three post-war tandem exploits before finally disbanding altogether.

In retrospect, the effort to hold the group together, what with its rather confusing substitutions for Cap and Bucky, seems a doomed enterprise. The name "All-Winners Squad" is cumbersome—note that only in the beginning of their 1970s incarnation did the JSA consider calling themselves the All-Star Squad; the relationships are strained; the group's raison d'etre is gone. Perhaps without the original Cap to hold them together, the team simply could not be expected to continue functioning. Sub-Mariner and the Torch had been rivals before and in another life they would be rivals again. Both the Young Allies and the Kid Commandos had perished with the original Bucky. And Miss America and the Whizzer were already making plans to retire to their lovenest.

There remain many untold stories yet to be related, which would have been chronicled had the Invaders' title lasted longer. A lot can happen to a group of heroes from 1943 to 1945, even considering how many solo battles those characters fought in those years, as shown in their own 1940s titles. But unless Marvel someday revives the continuity-implant idea (sans the departed Roy Thomas), we'll never know for sure. These, then are the Marvel super-teams of the 1940s, and of the 1940s seen from the 1970s. ●

III. MEMBERSHIP

To conclude our look at these great teams, and for future reference, we present a complete membership roster, which will be a regular feature of all articles in this series.

All group members are presumed to have joined as charter members, unless otherwise stated. Heroes' real names are unknown, if not given. "See also" references also pertain to other rosters in later articles in the series.

THE ALL-WINNERS SQUAD

Founded: ***WHAT IF? #4/ALL WINNERS #19***; Disbanded: ***ALL-WINNERS #21***

1. THE HUMAN TORCH (Jim Hamond, also spelled Hammond)
   see also ***INVADERS, AVENGERS*** (as Vision)
2. TORO (Toro Raymond)
   see also ***INVADERS, YOUNG ALLIES, KID COMMANDOS***
3. THE SUB-MARINER (Prince Namor I, Namor McKenzie)
   see also ***INVADERS, DEFENDERS***
4. THE WHIZZER (Robert L. Frank)
   see also ***LIBERTY LEGION, INVADERS***
6. CAPTAIN AMERICA II (formerly Spirit of '76)
   see also ***CRUSADERS*** (as Spirit of '76)
7. BUCKY II (Fred Davis)
   (Note: also appears—as Fred Davis—in ***MARVEL PREMIERE #30***.)
8. CAPTAIN AMERICA III (Jeff Mace)
   see also ***LIBERTY LEGION*** (as Patriot)

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THE LIBERTY LEGION

Founded: ***MARVEL PREMIERE #29***; Disbanded: ?

1. THE PATRIOT (Jeff Mace)
   see also ***ALL-WINNERS SQUAD*** (as Captain America III)
2. THE RED RAVEN
   (Note: also appears in ***X-MEN #44*** and ***SUB-MARINER #26***.)
3. THE THIN MAN (Bruce Dickson)
4. THE WHIZZER (Robert L. Frank)
   see also ***INVADERS, ALL-WINNERS SQUAD***
5. MISS AMERICA (Madeline Joyce)
   see also ***INVADERS, ALL-WINNERS SQUAD***
6. THE BLUE DIAMOND (Elton T. Morrow)
7. JACK FROST

THE INVADERS

Founded: ***GIANT-SIZE INVADERS #1*** Disbanded: ***WHAT IF? #4***

1. CAPTAIN AMERICA (Steve Rogers)
   see also ***AVENGERS***
2. BUCKY (James Buchanan Barnes)
   see also ***YOUNG ALLIES, KID COMMANDOS***
3. THE HUMAN TORCH (Jim Hamond, also spelled Hammond)
   see also ***ALL-WINNERS SQUAD, AVENGERS*** (as Vision)
4. TORO (Toro Raymond)
   see also ***YOUNG ALLIES, KID COMMANDOS, ALL-WINNERS SQUAD***
5. THE SUB-MARINER (Prince Namor I, Namor McKenzie)
   see also ***ALL-WINNERS SQUAD, DEFENDERS***
6. UNION JACK (Lord James Falsworth)
   Joins: ***INVADERS #8***
   see also ***FREEDOM'S FIVE***
7. SPITFIRE (Jacqueline Falsworth)
   Joins: ***INVADERS #11***
8. UNION JACK II (Brian Falsworth)
   Joins: ***INVADERS #20***
9. THE WHIZZER (Robert L. Frank)
   Joins: ***INVADERS #38***
   see also ***LIBERTY LEGION, ALL-WINNERS SQUAD***
10. MISS AMERICA (Madeline Joyce)
    Joins: ***INVADERS #38***
    see also ***LIBERTY LEGION, ALL-WINNERS SQUAD***

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THE KID COMMANDOS

Founded: ***INVADERS #28***; Disbanded: ?

1. BUCKY (James Buchanan Barnes)
   see also ***INVADERS, YOUNG ALLIES***
2. TORO (Toro Raymond)
   see also ***INVADERS, YOUNG ALLIES, ALL-WINNERS SQUAD***
3. THE HUMAN TOP (Davy Mitchell)
4. GOLDEN GIRL (Gwenny Lou Sabuki)

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FREEDOM'S FIVE

Only mention: ***INVADERS #7***

1. UNION JACK (Lord Falsworth)
   see also ***INVADERS***
2. THE PHANTOM EAGLE (Karl Kaufmann)
   Note: also appears in ***MARVEL SUPER-HEROES #116, HULK #135,*** and ***GHOST RIDER #12.***)
3. THE CRIMSON CAVALIER
4. SIR STEEL
5. THE SILVER SQUIRE

THE YOUNG ALLIES

Founded: ***YOUNG ALLIES #1***; Disbanded: ***YOUNG ALLIES #20*** or thereafter

1. BUCKY (James Buchanan Barnes)
   see also ***INVADERS, KID COMMANDOS***
2. TORO (Toro Raymond)
   see also ***INVADERS, KID COMMANDOS, ALL-WINNERS SQUAD***
3. KNUCKLES (Percival O'Toole)
4. JEFF (Jeff Sandervit)
5. TUBBY (Henry Tinkle)
6. WHITEWASH ("Whitewash" Jones)

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THE CRUSADERS

Founded: ***INVADERS #14***; Disbanded: ***INVADERS #15***

1. THE SPIRIT OF '76
   see also ***ALL-WINNERS SQUAD*** (as Captain America II)
2. DYNA-MITE (Roger Aubrey)
3. GHOST GIRL
4. TOMMY LIGHTNING
5. CAPTAIN WINGS
6. THUNDERFIST

FRANKLY SPEAKING...

by Roger Stern

I was one of the unlucky ones.

I was born too late to experience, first-hand, the early work of Frank Robbins on the classic ***SCORCHY SMITH*** newspaper strip. I grew up in a godforsaken section of Indiana where those dull-witted creatures known as newspaper feature editors passed over Frank's ***JOHNNY HAZARD,*** preferring instead to print the remarkably unfunny ***NANCY*** or the eternally annoying ***MARY WORTH.***

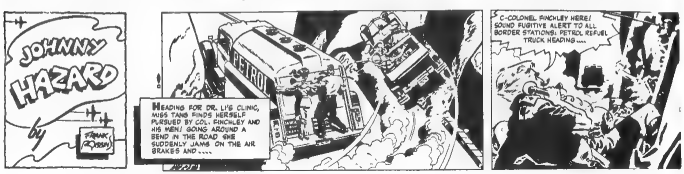
It was not until I was well into my twentieth year that I became aware of the artistry of Frank Robbins. I've spent the last decade trying to make up for lost time.

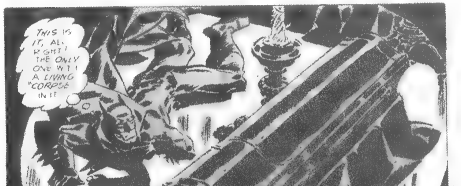
To be sure, I was aware of Frank Robbins, the writer. His stories for ***SUPERBOY*** were incredibly entertaining, especially those illustrated by the late, great Bob Brown and inked by Wally Wood. (Lana Lang never looked better, folks!) And when Frank started writing the ***"Batman"*** strip in ***DETECTIVE COMICS,*** I really started to appreciate the man's way with words. It's been awhile since I've picked through those musty old issues—some of the few DC comics I've saved over the years—but I remember a string of well-crafted, fast-paced stories that alternated with Denny O'Neil's rapidly-evolving Darknight Detective. It was obvious that Mr. Robbins was a very fine wordsmith.

It was Frank Robbins who introduced Kirk Langstrom to the Batman mythos in ***DETECTIVE #400,*** creating a macabre Man-Bat to bedevil the new/old-look Batman. That issue was the first of a trio of Man-Bat/Batman yarns which were illustrated by Neal Adams and Dick Giordano. With such an art team, the stories were assured the raves of comic fans. Fortunately, a number of readers got past the art long enough to see that there was a well-written story behind the glitz.

It was sometime during this period when a now-forgotten fanzine mentioned the fact that Frank Robbins was an artist, as well as a writer—that he drew some sort of newspaper adventure strip. My interest was naturally piqued. Unfortunately for me, it wasn't piqued enough to send me sifting through the out-of-town newspapers at the nearby decaying bus depot. (In those days, nearly every small town in the Midwest seemed to have a decaying bus depot.)

Then came ***DETECTIVE #416.*** The story was called ***"Man-Bat Madness!"*** and the


JOHNNY HAZARD
by
FRANK ROBBINS
HEADING FOR DR. LI'S CLINIC, MISS TANG FINDS HERSELF PURSUED BY COL. FINCHLEY AND HIS MEN! GOING AROUND A BEND IN THE ROAD SHE SUDDENLY JAMS ON THE AIR BRAKES AND....
PETROL
COLONEL FINCHLEY HERE! SOUND FUGITIVE ALERT TO ALL BORDER STATIONS! PETROL REFUEL TRUCK HEADING....
©1980 Roy Thomas Inc.


THIS IS IT, ALL RIGHT! THE ONLY ONE WITH A LIVING CORPSE IN IT
...WHO MIGHT'VE MET OUT SHOOTING IF I LIFT THE LID? SO I COULD'NT. HE "RESURRECT" HIMSELF!
©1970 DC Comics

A typical moody Robbins *"Batman"*, and below, a dynamic *INVADERS* SPLASH

credits read, "Story and Art by Frank Robbins." The art was different, weird, bizarre—and I savored each and every panel of it. The art was dark and full of shadows, at times bordering on the impressionistic. Thick gobs of black suggested backgrounds, rather than actually delineating them. Many of the figures were oddly twisted and contorted, but the overall dynamics of the storytelling were so overwhelming that I didn't give a damn. I just sat there in the drug store, eating it up!

Reader response to the story, and to the following four Robbins-illustrated Batman stories, left me baffled. Though there was a goodly number of people who liked Frank's work, there was apparently an equal number who hated it. And months later, when Robbins succeeded Mike Kaluta on DC's ***SHADOW*** comic, the response seemed even more negative. I was aghast. I understood that the Kaluta fans were disappointed, but Frank was perfectly capturing the period feel which the strip demanded...and it looked great! But nobody seemed to care. E.R. Cruz, a Phillipine artist of no small ability, soon took over the strip, but the ***SHADOW*** comic faded away from the comic racks within a few issues. I sadly shook my head, and turned my attentions to the then-existent ***MENOMONEE FALLS GAZETTE,*** which had started to carry the daily and Sunday ***JOHNNY HAZARD.***

For his part, Frank Robbins faded away from DC, save for a few mystery stories still in the inventory drawer. And, within a few short months, he resurfaced at Marvel.

I can still remember the excitement of picking up ***CAPTAIN AMERICA #182*** and finding Frank Robbins' art inside. I can still recall my disbelief when certain fans wrote in, lambasting the art as primitive. And, as many of those hyper-critics tended to be the same cynical voices who decried the mythical "Marvel House-Style," the negative mail was doubly unbelievable. Gradually, the poison pen letters subsided. Readers were finally giving the Robbins look a chance to grow on them, and they were starting to get into it. Within a year, though, Frank yielded up ***CAPTAIN AMERICA*** to Jack Kirby and started devoting his time to a book for which he at last gained some of the recognition he so richly deserved. That book was, of course, ***THE INVADERS.***

From the very first double-sized issue, you just knew that something great was happening. In those pages, Frank Robbins captured a mood, a feel of a decade nearly four decades agone. Years of accumulated research and experience went into each and every story, and you could tell. There was an authenticity to the architecture and weaponry in ***THE INVADERS*** which beggared description. One is tempted to say that ***THE INVADERS*** was the strip which Frank Robbins was born to draw. Such a statement would not only be hackneyed, but it would denigrate the rest of Frank's work. And that must not be! For, from ***SCORCHY SMITH*** to ***"The Batman,"*** from ***JOHNNY HAZARD*** to ***THE INVADERS,*** Robbins has proven himself to be a masterful illustrator, an accomplished draftsman, and a most exciting storyteller.

In 1978, Frank Robbins moved to Mexico for a well-deserved retirement, and the comics industry lost the services of one of its finest professionals. We can only wish Frank a long and healthy life, and hope that, somehow, he knows how much we miss him.●

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IN THE STARLIT NIGHT SKY ABOVE CAIRO, CAPITAL OF WAR-TORN EGYPT, TWO OF THE FAR-FAMED INVADERS TAKE THE FAR-DESPERATE BATTLE—YET IN BATTLE AGAINST THE BERLIN-BAGHDAD AXIS WHO CALLS HIMSELF THE SCARLET SCARAB!
NAMOR! HIS FABULOUS WINGS CAN'T PENETRATE THAT AURA AROUND HIM.
IT'S UP TO YOU, OLD BUDDY!
MY BLOWS ARE AS USELESS AS YOUR FLAME, TORCH!
THE SCARAB SEEMS ALMOST INVINCIBLE!

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GUILTY FANTASIES

a column by PETER B. GILLIS

Hi there **True Believers** and peerless NMPeople! This installment of Pete's Podium is gonna be really special! I'm not one to brag, but it looks like 1985 is sure going to go down in history as the Year of the New (Media) Age of Graphic Excitement! So hang onto your hats, anxious ones, while I give you the low-down on what NMP'll be winging your way in the new year!

Well, as you all know, those of you that didn't follow Los Angeles into the sea or get blown up along with New Dehli, ***KUNG-FU ZOMBIE VAMPIRE COMICS*** is the hit of the season! And since we've always maintained that ***you're*** really the editors at New Media, ***KFZVC*** is now on sale ***monthly!***

—You've read about it in the newspapers! Heard about it on the Tonight Show! The world awaits it with bated breath! And ***NMP*** is ***THERE!*** Yes, the stunning sequel to Brian DePalma's space-fantasy epic ***LIFE ON URANUS, SPECIAL EFFECTS FROM BEYOND THE STARS,*** will be a super-special NMP Album Presentation! With a script by Harlan Ellison from the original Glen A. Larson screenplay, and mind-blowing, senses-shattering art by Ernie Bushmiller, we've really pulled out all the stops for you on this one!

—Never let it be said that NMP isn't constantly forging ahead! 1985 is going to see the publication of a mag that will rock comics to its very foundations! Say hello to ***YET AGAIN FUNNIES.*** I'm really excited about this one! It's a multi-story book containing such soon-to-be-classic strips as—

"The Skulker-Arounder:" mysterious, striking terror into the hearts of the underworld, a creature of the night, he is dedicated to the extermination of crime, no matter what the cost (and that goes for copyright infringements!)

"Uglyguy": misunderstood by an uncomprehending world, beneath the visage of a monster beats the heart of—a man! How can this brilliant scientist live with the curse that haunts him forever? (Especially since you know that if the strip is a success, he's never going to get cured.)

"Star Smarmers:" Against a savage universe they roam the spaceways, laughing, joking, loving, visiting planets that real SF writers would never ***consider*** inventing! Steve Squarejaw, Julie Zaftig, Huntington "Nerd" O'Rourke, and the decidedly unique Formularian Grratwitus! The universe will never be the same again!

And last but not least, ***"Remarkable Man":*** working for a top secret project, unaccountably-muscular-and-handsome scientist Basalt Gneiss, trapped in a runaway experiment, gains strange and mysterious powers far beyond those of mortal men, and when his best friend is destroyed by the forces of evil, he vows to fight crime and injustice wherever it may be! And when he does, watch out!

The first issue of ***YET AGAIN*** will be on sale in May. The premiere issue will be #452. (If you can figure that one out, you're better than **we** are!)

—For those of you art lovers out there, who've been clamoring for more, more, more of the eyepooping art we've been winging your way, NMP proudly presents ***AIRBRUSH ILLUSTRATED!*** No stories; precious few characters; just page after page of what you want; airbrushing! Also a special section of drawings cribbed from photographs! PLUS: a special fold-out of a really, really big spaceship with more little doodads on it than you've ever seen in your life! But be warned: it costs $17.95 an issue, so save up those shekels, pilgrim!

—For years now, the Pulse-Poundin' One (Mr. Gillis to the world at large) has been on the lecture circuit, speaking at colleges, universities, day-care centers and the like; saying that comic books are not necessarily kid-stuff! (We've known it all along, culture lovers, but some people have yet to get the message!)

And now NMP is about to come out with a comic that should make all those Doubting Thomases and Rotten Ralphies of the world sit up and take notice! I'm talking about ***PRETENTIOUS COMICS,*** and believe me, you soon will be, too. Now we could lead you along, tease you a little bit here and there, but I'll let you know straight out: we've gathered the most distinguished, respected, overqualified men that money can buy to work on this project, and believe me, I'm proud as punch! Here's just a sample of our first issue:

"Macroeconomics Man," by the classic team of Milton Friedman (script) and John Kenneth Galbraith (pencils **and** inks!)

"The Rhetoric Raiders" by Abbie Hoffman (in his triumphant return to the comics after twenty years!), William F. Buckley (layouts) and the Ayatollah Khomeini (finished art).

"Positivist Man and Empiricist Woman" by a special surprise team of analytic philosophers. All I can say about this one is that this could very well go into ***AIRBRUSH ILLUSTRATED!*** Read it—if you can!

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"Surfsitart Man": Alistair Cooke, in his pencilling debut (who can forget his inks on ***SGT. PICASSO AND HIS CUBIST COMMANDOS?***) brings you the story of a hero who dares to shake the very foundations of the evil Median Empire, led by his arch enemy Dedline and his killer Genroids. Armed only with Significant Dichotomies and Salient Points, he fights a desperate battle! The script is by that triple-threat collaborative trio John Simon, Northrop Frye, and Gene Shalit! Inks by that talented newcomer Marc Chagall, Jr.!

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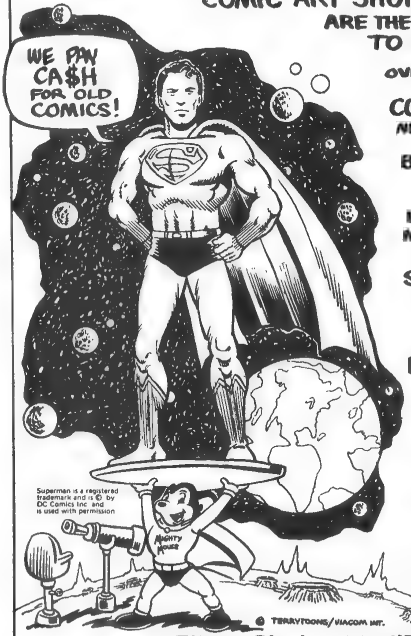
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FICTION HOUSE

by Chuck Wooley

Although little known today, Fiction House comics had a major impact on the comic reading public of the 1940s. They published a total of 812 comics from October of 1938 through at least the Winter of 1953, issuing thirteen titles that ran successfully more than ten issues each, and ten titles that did not.

Fiction House actually had a rather curious birth, and it is today virtually impossible to determine precisely when the delivery commenced. Certainly we know that the first Fiction House comic was ***JUMBO COMICS #1***, October 1938; we also know, with certainty, that this comic and the other early Fiction House comics were the result of a collaboration between S.M. "Jerry" Iger and Will ("The Spirit") Eisner. There is much, however, that is clouded by the passage of time.

For example, why do so many of the stories in ***JUMBO COMICS #1*** begin in the middle of a story? Why is it that this first publication from a new comics publisher would fail to start the stories in the beginning, where all normal publisher's start their stories, and would instead begin the story with, say, page 11? At first blush, this simply does not make any sense.

There was method to this apparent madness, however. For the truth is that Eisner & Iger were doing much more in 1938 than simply packaging ***JUMBO COMICS***. They were, in fact, attempting to create both a comic "shop" and a newspaper syndicate.

In 1936 there were only a handful of modern comic publishers (Dell, National/DC, Kay Kamen, McKay, United Features Syndicate, Quality, Centaur, Eastern and Henle). All together, these nine publishers were issuing about 16 comics titles, which meant that an average month in 1936 saw perhaps 6 new comics on the newsstands. The modern comic book had only been around since 1933, after all, and the field was in its infancy, much as newspaper strips were in their infancy in 1898.

Both Iger and Eisner saw immense potential in this new narrative art form, however, and, feeling they were in the right place at the right time, they sought to influence the future of the comic book. Once their relationship began, an arrangement was created whereby Eisner would be in charge of comic strip production, and Iger would be in charge of selling what was produced. This arrangement lasted about three years, until early 1940, when Eisner sold his interest in their partnership to Iger so that Eisner could pursue the creation of The Spirit.

In the meanwhile, these two men had produced both a comic book shop and a newspaper syndicate. William Randolph Hearst (Patty's grandfather) had created the first newspaper syndicate in 1912, and by late 1937 or early 1938 Eisner & Iger had formed the illfated "Universal Phoenix Features Syndicate."

Before the demise of Universal Phoenix, however, Eisner & Iger did manage to sell at least one strip overseas. The strip's name, of course, was "Sheena Queen of the Jungle." Contrary to popular belief, then, Sheena did not first appear in ***JUMBO COMICS #1***. She first appeared in some now-unknown European publication. Regretfully, no copies of this European publication are now know to exist. Worse still, no copies of the first ten pages of the Sheena strip are known to exist, anywhere! The Sheena story that began in ***JUMBO COMICS*** #1 actually starts on page eleven, and is so numbered.

Although Universal Phoenix did poorly, and was out of business fairly quickly, the comic "shop" created by Eisner & Iger (which apparently supplied FH with all of its material) endured until about 1954, and was one of the most prolific of all shops ever founded. A "shop," as Bill Ward explained to me a few years ago, was simply a method of mass-producing comics. Each story would be broken down into perhaps 7 elements (e.g. writing, pencilling, inking, lettering) and whoever was available, generally speaking, did whatever was next to do to complete the story. Universal Phoenix may have been a failure, but the Eisner & Iger shop was a noteworthy success. (It was also noteworthy for hiring women and blacks when many shops would not.)

In fact, it is the author's belief that the early success of the E & I shop was founded upon the strength of the people working for it. By August of 1941 all of the following immensely talented individuals had been involved with the E & I shop: Jack Kirby, whose first professional work appeared in ***JUMBO COMICS #1***; Bob Kane, creator of The Batman, did most of the ***PETER PUPP*** stories which appeared in ***JUMBO #1-23***; Will Eisner's work appeared repeatedly, most often in ***"Hawks of the Seas"***; Bernard Bailey created ***"Gilda Gay —the Modern Girl"*** for E & I about a year and a half before he created The Spectre and Hourman for National/DC; Dick Briefer did perhaps the best work of his career (***FRANKENSTEIN*** notwithstanding) in the ***"Hunchback of Notre Dame"*** (which itself had appeared in Henle's 1936 ***WOW COMICS***, packaged by Iger and perhaps Eisner); Mort Meskin did excellent work on ***"Sheena"*** before the strip was taken over by Bob Powell, who unquestionably did the finest work of his career on it; even Stan Lee himself had work appear in ***JUMBO COMICS***. Page 54 in issue #30 clearly credits him.

Of course, part of Fiction House's success resulted from being in the right place at the right time. It is much simpler to establish a business in a field that is expanding than one which is contracting, and the comics field was

The author wishes to gratefully acknowledge the immense aid given him by noted Fiction House collector Peter Leavitt, without whose generous assistance this article would not have been possible.

©1941 Fiction House

expanding from perhaps 6 comics a month in 1936 to about 400 a month in 1946. Nonetheless, Fiction House deserves great credit for carving so distinctive a niche in the foundation of early comics history. After all, many publishers (e.g. Progressive Publications, Inc. —see ***CF #8***) tried to become established during this "boom" period and failed.

Perhaps the single most important reason that Fiction House did so well is that it underwent widespread experimentation during its first two years and then developed an extremely distinctive style to which its readers could return week after week. The early issues of ***JUMBO COMICS*** might have anything on the cover #1 featured Uncle Otto, the creation of Carl Heck; #2 featured Charlie McCarthy; #3 Joe "wanna buy a duck" Penner; #5, Santo Claus; #8 the New York World's Fair. Sheena did not appear on a cover as a main feature until ***JUMBO COMICS #9***, and she was not featured consistently until #17. By ***JUMBO #18*** (August 1940), however, Fiction House had developed its distinctive style, a style which relied heavily upon the depiction of women to sell the comics.

JUMBO COMICS was the only comic published by Fiction House until January of 1940, when they released ***JUNGLE COMICS***, ***PLANET COMICS***, and ***FIGHT COMICS***. The first issue of their fifth publication, ***WINGS COMICS***, was dated September 1940, and the first issue of ***RANGERS OF FREEDOM*** (their sixth comic) debuted about a year later, dated October 1941. Although Fiction House would issue seventeen more comic titles, these first six accounted for 682 of the 812 comics they would publish.

Fiction House's six titles became firmly established during WWII, which was the ultimate era of the pin-up. Since most Fiction House comics featured pin-up type material as part of their distinctive style, and since WWII generated an incessant demand for such meterial, the company prospered. There was, however, much more to FH's success than the simple portrayal of women as objects of decoration intended for the enjoyment of men.

In fact, through characters like Sheena and Firshair, Fiction House provided a relatively non-sexist role model for the emerging "modern" woman of the WWII era, and this, too, contributed to FH's success. After all, WWII changed much more in America than the demand for pin-ups.

In fact, if one checks the popular literature of America for female role models prior to WWII, one finds very few that did not simply reflect the typical opinion that a female's place was in the home. Due to a myriad of socio-economic forces which made America pre-eminent in worldwide productivity, a woman's place could be in the home. It was not necessary, as it had been in America's frontier days, for the "woman of the house" to be involved in work outside of her own domestic affairs.

WWII changed this, however. With so many men involved in the military, women became indispensable in the factories. Ladies who had been insulted during the 1930s for wishing to do more with their lives than produce babies and provide maid service suddenly found themselves accepted outside the home, in the overwhelmingly male workforce. These women became responsible for their own lives, something which had not been typical in our culture for several generations.

Naturally, many reacted like most people do when faced with indimidating new circumstances: they sought role models, specifically of other women who were single and doing what had previously been considered to be "male" jobs.

They found such a role model in Sheena, as well as in many of the other positive females depicted in Fiction House comics. Most of the ladies in ***PLANET***, ***JUNGLE***, ***FIGHT***, ***RANGERS*** and ***WINGS*** were dynamic and independent. They knew their own minds and sought to accomplish whatever they believed they should accomplish. True, a lot of them were captured by Nazis and tied up, but this was merely a reflection of stark reality (the Nazis really were doing this) and even more importantly, the ladies in bondage were very evenly balanced by the men in bondage. During the height of WWII, ZX-5, a FH male spy, spent more time tied up and being tortured than any FH heroine that the author remembers encountering.

In physical appearance, the first 8 ***JUMBO***s

The Hawk in a bind.
WE KNEW IT ALL THE TIME, MURDERER!
WAIT! YE ARE MAKING A MISTAKE!
GIT AWAY! 'E'S OUR PROPERTY NOW!
1981 Fiction House

were very large sized, measuring 10 1/4" x 14 1/8", and had 64 pages plus covers. Features ran from ½ page to 5 pages, and contained every type of comic story imaginable. The first issue alone featured funny animals, a kid strip, an "uncle" strip, a puzzle, detective types, an occult-type, "Laff" fillers, text with illos, westerns, a spy strip, sports heroes, an emancipated female, a feature on media stars, and even one on modern planes. The first 8 ***JUMBO***s were all B&W inside, although printed on different color papers. Issue #9 was the first FH comic printed in color, and it, too, is oddly shaped, measuring 8 1/4" x 10 1/16". By #11, (Dec '39-Jan '40) the magazine was stabilizing somewhat and was normal in appearance. The 23 separate editorial features had been reduced to 15, and at no time would the number of features in ***JUMBO*** drop below eight.

The entire FH line of comics, after January of 1940, was remarkably stable. Once established, a feature could count on a fairly long run, usually more than 30 issues. Some, of course, lasted less time, but then some, like "***Hateful Herman***" probably did not deserve a particularly long run.

An average story in a FH comic ran about 7 or 8 pages, although at one point Sheena was running 15 pages per story. Due to narrative requirements, many FH stories developed along formulaic lines. The hero(ine) would be introduced in a normal environment, which would be disrupted by the "plot stimulus," which resulted either from machinations of the story's villain, or from some particular desire on the part of the hero(ine). The hero(ine) then proceeds to locate a villain, who normally defeats the hero(ine) during their first encounter, but who then loses to the hero(ine) immediately before the story's conclusion. The hero(ine) then returns to a fairly normal state (for a comic book character).

This formulaic approach was utilized repeatedly by Fiction House in all of the types of stories they published, in all their comic titles, whether the type was jungle, detective, submarine, war, western, SF, horror, or superhero. Fiction House experimented with all these types and many more, producing extremely entertaining stories all the while.

Although we have not dealt extensively with most of FH's titles, the type of story they issued was usually interchangeable from title to title. If a reader read one FH title in a given month that reader would get a pretty good idea of what was in all the other FH titles that month.

To conclude, we should note that Fiction House was born in the depression and reached maturity during WWII. Although they toyed a bit with super-heroes, their first allegiance was clearly to the common woman or man, thrust into extreme circumstance, who triumphs by force of will, determination, and intelligence over the multitude of adversarial forces which assail them. Collectors who are not familiar with Fiction House would be well advised to sample a few while copies are still to be had for less than $5. Fiction House issued a superb line of comics, as more and more collectors are learning each year. One needn't buy them for their commercial value, however. Rather, one can buy them because they're fun to read, and because they reflect the remarkable era that was WWII. ●

SHEENA, STILL QUEEN OF THE JUNGLE

by Chuck Wooley

Although it is true that Fiction House issued dozens of major characters and hundreds of minor ones, none made the impact upon our national consciousness that Sheena did. She was a non-super-human lady who faced life as it came, wandering about most of Africa in her quest to find adventure and to right wrongs. Sheena appeared in 18 issues of her own magazine, one 3-D comic, and all 167 issues of ***JUMBO COMICS***. For a brief time, she even had two stories in each ***JUMBO*** (***#141-149***), and in issues ***#131*** and ***#132*** she had a one-page filler feature as well. When most of the strips in ***JUMBO*** were running 7 or 8 pages each, Sheena usually ran 10-12 pages. At times, her stories were 15 pages each.

Aside from appearing on all the covers of her own magazine, Sheena was also prominently featured on the covers of ***JUMBO #s 9, 13, 15,*** and ***17***. She was given the full cover commencing with issue ***#18***, and that position of honor remained hers without interruption until ***#161***, at which time the "***Ghost Gallery***" was given the main cover spot through ***JUMBO***'s last issue, ***#167***, dated March of 1953.

What was she like, this Jungle Lady? She was beautiful, but tough. She was composssionate, but punished the evil-doers. At times she wandered alone, but she was usually accompanied by her consort, Bob (who appeared on about half the ***JUMBO*** covers with her) and their friendly chimp, Chim. At times she was homeless, and at other times she presided over a great kingdom in central Africa. She was frequently captured by evil-doers but always managed to escape and usually managed to punish those who did wrong. She dearly loved her jungle and she felt very close to others who

loved it.

One reason that Sheena was so popular (aside from her open costume, which revealed more of her breasts than ladies of the time were supposed to allow) was that the quality of the art depicting her was so high. On the covers of the comics she was depicted by the likes of Zolnerowich, Saaf, and Viscardi (Nick Cardy). Her earliest interiors were done by Mort Meskin, who complemented carefully-constructed panels with fine renderings, making the early Sheena very moody and therefore captivating. Late in her career she was occasionally drawn by the swamp-loving R.H. Webb, who also drew ***"The Hawk"*** for ***JUMBO*** during FH's middle and late-middle period.

The depiction of Sheena unquestionably reached its highest point, however, once Bob Powell got into the strip. Powell's first Sheena was probably the one that appeared in ***JUMBO COMICS #9***, and he was certainly working on the strip by #13, which he signed. His influence on the strip lasted for about another 45 issues, although he did not draw all of them.

During Powell's peak, the Sheenas he drafted were spectacular, though in an understated way. Utilizing a fine line, Powell created jungle vistas which rivalled Foster and surpassed Hogarth. The care and attention to detail which Powell lavished upon the strip will set his Sheena apart from most comic strips because he drew an enduring classic. His anatomy alone captured the essence of the lone champion striving against great odds. This facet of Sheena's character was usually pre-eminent, and it, like Powell's renderings, will be remembered far into the future. ●

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End NOTES

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As far as comics readers are concerned, there was something very important missing from the 1980 presidential campaign: Pogo, the star of the late Walt Kelly's comic strip of the same name, was not in the running, nor were any members of his supporting cast. It appeared that way, in any event. The ***POGO*** comic strip itself was discontinued several years ago, but there were reports in such diverse places as ***THE NEW YORK TIMES, PEOPLE*** magazine, and *Cat Yronwode's **BUYER'S GUIDE*** column that Pogo would indeed run in 1980 through the vehicle of a stop-motion animated film, entitled ***I GO POGO***. An excerpt of the film even appeared on a recent CBS television special about comic strips. But the film was never released to theatres, and although Fotomat briefly advertised the sale of video cassettes of the film, the company quickly dropped ***I GO POGO*** from its catalogue. It all serves as further proof of the difficulties these days in launching an independent presidential candidacy, especially for an opossum. Howard the Duck's candidacy brightened 1976 but after Captain America's withdrawal, the politically-minded mainstream comics readers had nowhere to turn in 1980 (unless he went underground and voted for Zippy the Pinhead, but that was another story).

Unlike virtually all other comics-***POGO*** has always been regarded as "respectable" by opinion-makers in the mass media. Most of the run of the strip has been published in book form beginning in the 1950s, and in recent years Fireside Books has issued several ***POGO*** volumes, each of which reprints two or three of the original books. However, as with ***DOONESBURY*** today, the press usually acclaims ***POGO*** because of its political concerns. Kelly's observation that "We have met the enemy and they are us" was not originally made about ecology, but both he and the ecology movement turned it to that use. More significantly, there was the gallery of caricatured political figures who turned up among the anthropomorphic talking animals of Pogo's Okefenokee Swamp. My first awareness of Senator Joseph McCarthy came from reading the sequences in ***TEN EVER-LOVIN' BLUE-EYED YEARS WITH POGO*** dealing with Kelly's caricature of him, the cunning redneck wildcat Simple J. Malarkey. Malarkey was the first and most powerful of Kelly's caricatured political figures, and he was followed by such notables as Mr. Pig and the Goat (Khrushchev and Castro); a centaur in a cowboy hat known as the Lone Arranger and a somewhat pathetic bespectacled old longhorn steer (both Lyndon Johnson); a grinning, square-jawed right-winger cat whose vision was obscured by his square-lensed glasses (Barry Goldwater); a Southern version of Chicken Little (George Wallace); a hyena intentionally misidentified as a bear (Spiro Agnew); a wiretapping bulldog and bird (J. Edgar Hoover and John Mitchell); and finally, a crowned teakettle-shaped spider (Richard Nixon circa Watergate). ***POGO*** regulars Molester P. Mole and Deacon Mushrat (whom today Kelly would probably be starring in a satire on the Moral Majority) founded the Jack Acid Society, a parody of the John Birch Society, and busily compiled a blacklist of everyone whom they considered to be possible subversives, ultimately including themselves.

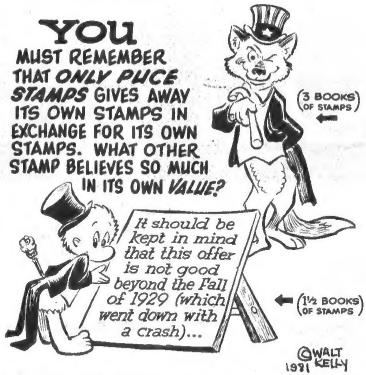
In 1960 a baby insect named Fremount, who could say no more than "Jes' fine," ran for president only to land in trouble when he was exposed as an ant lion, leading to fears that he would "eat ants": here, presumably, Kelly was kidding John F. Kennedy's relative youthfulness and, later, satirizing the controversy over Kennedy's Catholicism. The Goldwater-cat worked for ***NEWSLIFE***, a burlesque of ***TIME***, and among the stories he covered was Howland Owl's campaign for Congressman, which was characterized by his rambling, tangled, convoluted speeches, perhaps parodying Dwight Eisenhower's, and his McCarthy-ite platform of investigating dreams for their possible subversive content.

Meanwhile, there were the Cowbirds, two incompetent American Communist spies whom the swamp's various witch-hunters entirely ignored.

Kelly also dealt in social comment, satirizing unions, for example, and also segregationalists. In the 1950s, the Mouse and Snavely the snake set up a "speakeasy school" to operate undercover while segregationalists had closed down the others. In the 1960s for ***THE POGO POOP BOOK*** Kelly devised an affecting tale about the loneliness and terror felt by a child who has a Klansman for a father. One of Kelly's most masterful inventions was Puce Stamps, a means of satirizing consumer society that expanded from the strip into an entire book: ***THE POGO PUCE STAMP CATALOG*** displayed a lengthy assortment of complicated, totally impractical, and utterly worthless goods and services that would *not* be sent to you if you accumulated the right number of Puce trading stamps.

Again, like ***DOONESBURY*** today, ***POGO*** many times enraged newspaper editors who refused to permit treatment of politics on the comics page, perhaps believing that comics are only for children, or (perhaps more likely) that satire that actually takes a position against something is by definition not humor but heavy-handed propoganda that will brainwash the readers (who cannot be expected to think for themselves). Kelly eventually had to write out Simple J. Malarkey due to a paper's threat to drop the strip, and in the 1960s, he prepared a selection of "cute bunny" strips (recently reprinted in the Pogo fanzine ***THE OKEFENOKEE STAR***) that editors could substitute for ones on political subjects.

But to concentrate solely on the socially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It should be kept in mind that this offer is not good beyond the Fall of 1929 (which went down with a crash)...
(1½ BOOKS OF STAMPS)
©WALT KELLY 1971

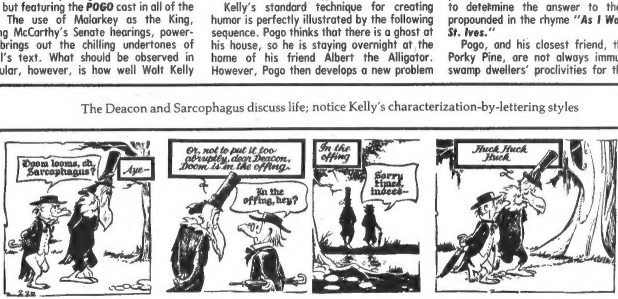
and politically "relevant" aspects of ***POGO*** is to distort one's perceptions of the nature of the strip. In fact, only a fraction of the ***POGO*** strips are concerned with "relevant" topics: the rest of the time ***POGO*** often features slapstick scenes of funny animals hitting each other with pies and falling into water. How can one reconcile the sequences with "serious" satirical intentions with the majority, which indulge merely in frivolity?

One might get a hint from Kelly's ***"Who Stole the Tarts?"*** in ***THE POGO STEPMOTHER GOOSE*** (and reprinted in ***TEN EVER-LOVIN'...***). This is an adaptation in comics form of the trial scene from ***ALICE'S ADVENTURES IN WONDERLAND*** only using Lewis Carroll's own words but featuring the ***POGO*** cast in all of the roles. The use of Malarkey as the King, evoking McCarthy's Senate hearings, powerfully brings out the chilling undertones of Carroll's text. What should be observed in particular, however, is how well Walt Kelly and Lewis Carroll blend together here. But this should not be any surprise. Kelly is basically a nonsense writer, working in an area of humor more often associated with the British (from Carroll, Lear, and Gilbert, through the Goons and the Pythons) than with Americans. Like Carroll, Kelly likes to use animals as his characters, and both men have created nonsense worlds on which to set their stories: Carroll has Wonderland and the Looking-Glass World, while Kelly has his funny-animal-filled Okefenokee Swamp (with occasional side-trips for Pogo to a funny-animal-filled section of Australia, including its mythical "Lost World" region called Pandemonia (See ***PREHYSTERICAL POGO IN PANDEMONIA***)).

Kelly's standard technique for creating humor is perfectly illustrated by the following sequence. Pogo thinks that there is a ghost at his house, so he is staying overnight at the home of his friend Albert the Alligator. However, Pogo then develops a new problem which upsets him as greatly: "I can't sleep here...I ain't got no nightshirt." The rabbit Bun Rab, who is also at Albert's, points out, "But they's a ghost over at your place...You can't sleep there either." Pogo sulks: "Well, I can't sleep nowheres without no nightshirt." Bun Rab then suggests, "Why not nip home, git one, an' hustle back?" Pogo pronounces this to be a good idea and leaves. Then Bun Rab looks perplexed: "There's ***something*** stupid about that idea but I dunno jes' what." Albert, deep in thought, speculates "Mebbe he ain't got one clean...to wear...out visitin', that is." This is the typical strategem in nonsense humor: to follow an idea to its logical conclusion, however extreme it may be, while leaving out one logical key step. Often Kelly simultaneously has the characters go to emotional extremes as they pursue their wrong turns in logic. Sometimes they erupt in fury. In ***THE INCOMPLEAT POGO***, the Owl, having lost his glasses, mistakenly eats his own hat. The Turtle points this out, whereupon the Owl, missaplying the meaning of the words, declares, "I is had enough! You is sayin' I got a bad taste in hats! You is a wall-eyed oyster!" The Turtle replies, "An insult! I challenge you to a lifetime of bitter hatred." Very well, then, what will be the first step? Owl: "As the first step in our lifetime feud, I challenge you to a checker game with cookies." (Weapons are unavailable at the moment.) The Turtle accepts this ultimate challenge: "Winner take all." The characters could also become overwhelmed with sadness. A good example comes in ***"Yoo Hoo, Killed Cock Robin?"*** in ***THE POGO PEEK-A-BOOK***, in which Albert recites the poem ***"Who Killed Cock Robin?"*** to a group of children, becoming more and more emotionally involved—as if Cock Robin were real—until finally he literally collapses in tears. At other times the characters merely become obsessed with their trains of logical illogic, as in ***"More Mother Goose Nursery Rinds"*** in ***PEEK-A-BOOK***, in which Mother Goose (Albert) embarks on panel after panel of convoluted mathematical calculations to determine the answer to the question propounded in the rhyme ***"As I Was Going to St. Ives."***

Pogo, and his closest friend, the grumpy Porky Pine, are not always immune to the swamp dwellers' proclivities for this sort of

The Deacon and Sarcophagus discuss life; notice Kelly's characterization-by-lettering styles


Doom looms, eh, Sarcophagus?
Aye—
Oh, not to put it too crudely, alas Deacon, Doom is in the offing.
In the offing, hey?
In the offing
Sorry timed, moose—
Huck Huck Huck
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Kelly's "fine...evocation of a sense of dread": The showdown between Malarkey and the Mole

madness, but more often than not they function as observers, serenely listening and watching, and occasionally deflating the buffoons' pretensions with some simple remarks. The Owl runs on, "The first thing us animals gotta do to help people is to get one of us elected to Congers—namely, naturally, me!—Animals gotta have a voice—mine! The world needs brains at the helm." Pogo, in a small innocent voice: "Whose?"

Usually all the nonsense is entirely harmless. "Funny animals" in ***POGO*** as elsewhere represent childlike adults, whose emotions are easily triggered, and whose pursuit of ambitions (power, money, love, or merely ego reinforcement) can easily be likened to games. The swamp is a pastoral paradise where these child-adult animals play their games and—usually—no one ever gets hurt. At one point the Porky Pine almost explicitly speaks of the swamp as a utopia: he reads Emma Lazarus' poem about the Statue of Liberty and declares, "It's about our swamp—our home—where we don't bar the door—where we keeps a extra fish in the pot for stray comp'ny." Most of the characters retain an aura of childlike innocence, especially Pogo himself, who, unlike the others, is unconcerned with schemes to boost his own ego. At one point he says, "I figgers, Porky, that every man's heart is eventual in the right place." Porky replies, "An' I figgers, Pogo, that if a man's gonna be wrong 'bout somethin', that is the best wrong thing to keep bein' wrong about 'til forever."

But the swamp is not free from danger by any means. Significantly, the threats tend to emerge from deep within the dark, unexplored regions of the swamp (the repressed id, to be Freudian about it) or from without in the form of sinister invaders. The villains think along nonsensical lines too, but their actions carry grave consequences. Consider Malarkey's plan: "What we do, Mole, is tar an' feather everybody! Make 'em *all* birds. Then when we identifies birds we'll know what's about...they'll be what we say...accurate...no more hearsay...We need a pot as big as the ex-prexy here (measuring the Deacon, whom Malarkey has forcibly replaced as head of their club). Then as Bonfire Boys..." Mole adds, "We will be ready." As in the works of Barks, Gottfredson, and Gerber, death is a real possibility for the "funny animals" in Kelly's work. In fact, not even in the adventure strips have I found so fine an evocation of a sense of dread as in the Deacon's final confrontation with Malarkey.

Unfortunately, Kelly tends to sacrifice his power in presenting villainy. The Mole is chilling in his final appearance in the strip section of ***THE JACK ACID SOCIETY BLACK BOOK***, striding into the depths of the swamp, not to mention insanity, cackling over his final addition to the blacklist of suspected subversives, himself: "Abou Ben Molester heads the list!" But only a few years later the Mole is back dressing the Deacon up as "Miss Alaska/Hawaii" in the hope of grabbing the prize money in the Miss Cosmos Beauty Pagent (see ***THE RETURN OF POGO***). The Mole, Wiley Catt, and Sarcophagus MacAbre degenerated from menaces to clowns, although it is hard to blame Kelly for this: his love of comedy seems simply to have proved stronger than his interest in life's darker side.

It is also important to note that Kelly shows that even the "good" characters can follow illogical paths down dangerous routes through the stories of the two disappearances of the Pup Dog. In the first, Albert is unfairly accused of eating the Pup and is put on trial by a kangaroo court organized by his swamp neighbors. In the second, Albert himself and the Owl incorrectly pin the blame on the Mole, merely because they do not trust him.

There is much else worth discussing about ***POGO***. There is Kelly's skill at delineating subtleties of thought and emotion through his characters' facial expressions and body language. No other strip plays with language so entertainingly and so well, most prominently in the nonsense songs and poetry Kelly devises. Closely related is his celebrated usage of particular lettering styles to convey the tone of a character's voice: the Deacon speaks in Gothic type, the morbid Sarcophagus MacAbre uses the black-bordered work balloons with funeral-card-style lettering, and the bear showman P.T. Bridgeport speaks not with word balloons but with circus posters. Then there is Kelly's playfully self-conscious use of the comics medium. For example, the Turtle rises in anger against word balloons and begins blasting all he can find with his shotgun. For a while the Bear goes so far as to secede from ***POGO*** and start his own comic strip within the ***POGO*** Sundays themselves, called ***LI'L ORPHAN ABNER***, and the Turtle acacts as "border guard" between the two strips.

There is something else I missed in 1980. No one in comics was better at evoking joy than Kelly. His storylines often concluded in the best comedic tradition with a festive banquet for the Okefenokee community. Christmas is a more joyous occasion in ***POGO*** than in any other comic, saluted as it is by the singing of Kelly's celebrated nonsense carol ***"Deck Us All with Boston Charlie"*** and usually capped by the Christmas strip itself which took the form of a Christmas card featuring the cast, thereby including the readers in their own celebration. Finally there was the annual ritual in which Porky appears at the crack of dawn to present Pogo with his Christmas present: a flower saved from the Summer which becomes an emblem of true friendship. Christmas is not quite the same without ***POGO*** in the newspaper—luckily, the many ***POGO*** books are still with us. ●

AND ALL THE TERRITORY ON THAT SIDE OF THE TREE, I'M CLAIMIN' TO BE THE BEAR STRIP!
ALL ON OTHER SIDE IS HUMOR MAGE TO STAY IN NEW STRIP IN.
© WALT KELLY

The Bear in throes of dementia

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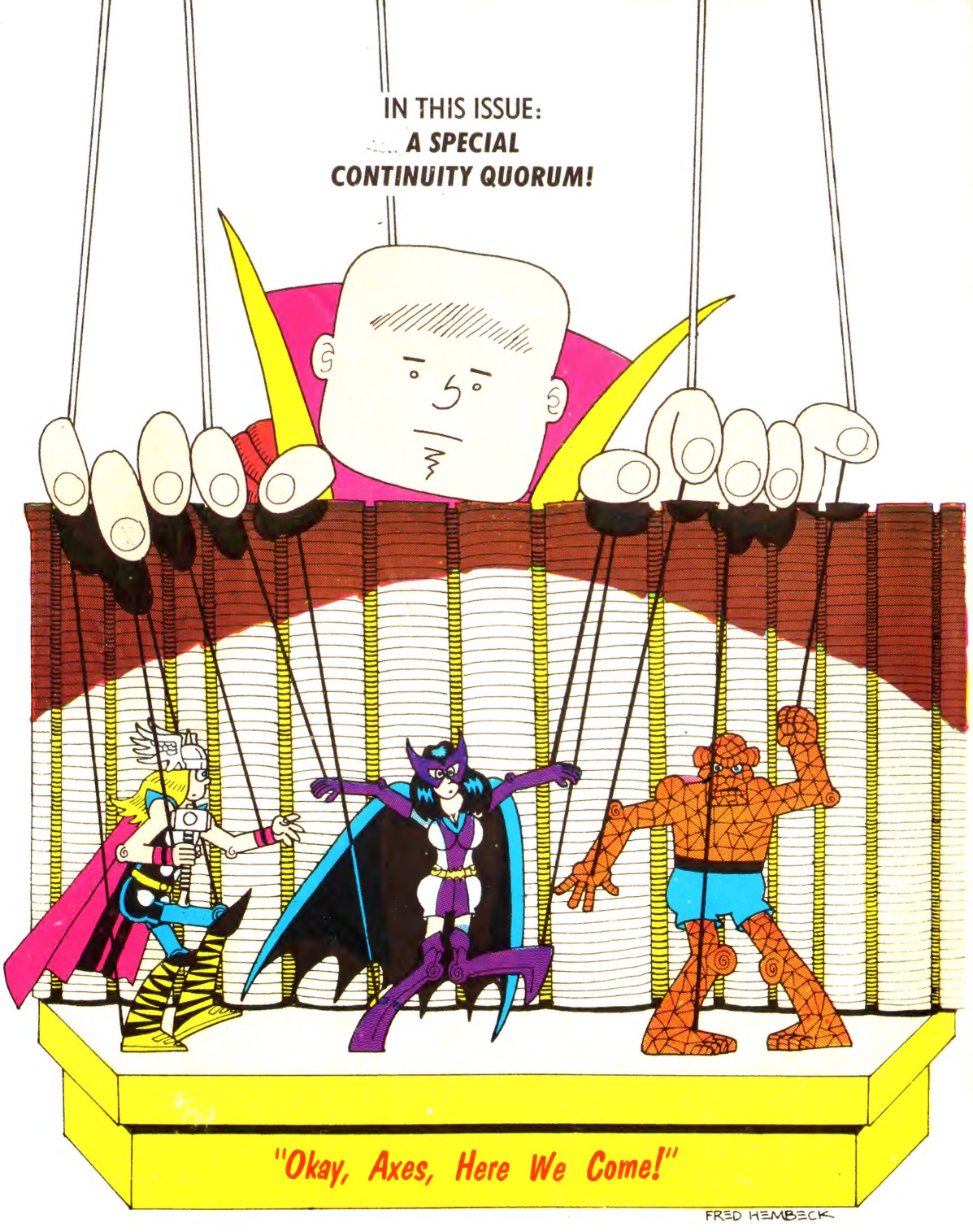
IN THIS ISSUE:
A SPECIAL
CONTINUITY QUORUM!
"Okay, Axes, Here We Come!"
FRED HEMBECK